

Members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Cheyanna Heukendorf and my daughter is an 8th grader in School District 16.

This shutdown has had a huge impact on my daughter's schooling. She started the year off transferring to a new school and she was looking forward to making new friends. I signed her up to do the hybrid model to give her a chance to meet some new friends. She was in school two days and home three days each week.

By mid-November she had 50 missing assignments and initially she wasn't one of the kids that was able to still go to school, in person to get additional help. She currently does not have an IEP or a 504 plan. She struggles every day to get her assignments turned in. She struggles to stay focused while at home. Even when the "distractions" are removed, she still struggles.

I had a video conference with her teachers and they all said the same thing: While in school, she is engaged while learning, and at home she is not engaged at all. The second trimester started on December 8th (I believe) and she is still behind. When the final grades came out for the first trimester, she failed all but 2 classes.

Some of the work she doesn't fully understand and some of the work she does. There is minimal to no motivation to do the work and if the work isn't done there are no consequences. How is that teaching? She was never a straight A student, but she enjoyed going to school. She enjoyed being able to get out of the house and see her friends. Now, she hates school and would rather quit, then continue doing distance learning.

The mental impact this has had on her is huge. She currently suffers from depression and anxiety. She will be starting the testing process to see if there is anything else that she suffers from and if she needs an IEP or 504 plan.

She turned 13 in April. At that time she wasn't allowed to see friends. Turning 13 is HUGE for a little girl and to not be able to celebrate with family and friends was difficult for her. She started to feel depressed again and started having some "dark thoughts". Thankfully, I recognized that and was able to try and bring her spirits up. I did the best that I could with making sure she was seeing her therapist (via zoom), which she also struggles to engage in. She was taking her medications regularly and she was able to still talk with some friends on the phone.

Summer came and her mood started to improve because she was able to see her friends more and not just via Facetime. An incident happened over the summer, which is why she transferred school districts. That incident also caused her depression to come back, even while being on the medication. She signed up for soccer tryouts and made the team, which helped drastically with her mental health.

School started and she was doing ok, but falling further and further behind. I could see that she was feeling defeated. Fall came and the soccer games ended. Then the school moved to full distance learning for middle school, and then soccer was "paused". The defeat and frustration she felt was difficult to see. All I could do was tell her "I know this sucks and your feelings are valid". Then winter and the holiday's came. Can't see your family for Thanksgiving. Can't see your family for Christmas either. Some kids have a hard time understanding that. Yes, she understands why, but that doesn't make it any easier for her or the other kids.

The mental impact this has had on me, as her parent, has been the most challenging thing I've ever had to manage. Trying to work full time (12 to 14 hours) at a job that has completely changed its dynamic has been a whole new challenge.

My job in general can be very stressful and now that my job is half outside and half inside, it is another level of stress that honestly, I didn't even know existed. Now to add to that, I have to try and teach/help my daughter while I am at my job. I have to check to see what has been turned in for the day while I'm working. I have to call her or send her a message to make sure that she didn't fall back asleep or to make sure that she is getting her work done. It's to a point where she will be coming to work with me so that I can keep an eye on her. That is another stressor that I am not prepared for.

My husband does what he can while he is working too. When I get home from work, I talk with her to see how the day went. Most of the time it turns into an argument about what school work needs to be done and why it wasn't turned in. It is honesty to a point where I am ready to call it quits for her. I know that isn't the right decision, but that is where I am at. She is stressed and I am stressed.

The mental toll this has had on all kids, not just my daughter is something that should also be considered when making the decision of whether or not to allow kids back into school.

Thank you for your time,

Cheyanna Heukendorf