

Lisa Thompson  
512 2nd St NE  
Milaca, MN 56353

December 23, 2020

Members of the Senate Education committee,

My name is Lisa Thompson, and my children are students at Milaca Elementary School District 912. The shut-down of in-person school has been more than just a challenge, it has been devastating to my students.

My youngest is in Kindergarten and is on the Autism Spectrum. He was just beginning to make progress in adjusting to the new environment (ASD kids thrive on routine) when we went to Hybrid-learning and then Distance Learning. The loss of the social environment and the extra support (Occupational Therapy) have caused him to regress in social skills, listening and learning. He used to be so excited about school and what he was learning, now he has no motivation - the joy of learning has gone out of him. He has new and increased anxiety about everything and has just recently started seeing a mental health professional for it. He has an IEP through school for extra Occupational Therapy (for fine motor skills) and social skills. Sending papers and "social stories" home on paper are not working - he NEEDS that in person interaction. Zoom or Google Meet meetings don't work either. With his Sensory Processing trouble sitting at a computer, even for a short period of time, on a video chat is just too much. And a meeting with his peers via Zoom is unrealistic - there is just too much going on for him to handle. Since we began "at home learning" (as we call it) he has become withdrawn, sad and has increased behavior/sensory melt-downs than ever before.

My 2nd grader has become negative about himself and his ability to learn; he has more trouble controlling his temper. His anxiety is at a level that he cannot control and I am in the process of finding a mental health professional for him but there are waiting lists. He is not learning anything with the paper packets (they do not do any virtual learning) and is overwhelmed with the amount of them each day. He qualifies for Title-1 services (without an IEP) and learning at home with that is just not the same as in person. He refuses to participate in any of the optional zoom meetings as he doesn't like to be on camera. His self-esteem has declined to a level that is very concerning to me. A 7yo boy shouldn't have such insecure feelings about himself.

Both children lash out and cry when I even mention "school at home." There are tears, tempers, frustration and anger. Each boy is overwhelmed with the amount of papers they have to complete each day - if they were in class they wouldn't have any trouble

doing the work. In addition to their “regular” subjects they have to do the “specials” at home as well - which I haven’t even attempted to complete.

Because my Kindergartner needs additional help I need to sit with each child individually throughout the day to complete the assignments with frequent breaks for each of them. By the time we get just the “basic” subjects covered I’ve been sitting at the table with them (with few breaks for myself) for 7-8 hours. They are unable to share a work-space and each of them are unable to work independently. It is a full-time job for me as a parent and I’m a stay at home mom. I cannot imagine how difficult it is for families and single parent families where one or both parents work.

Our Children NEED to see their teachers/paras and other school staff IN PERSON. They NEED to be back in the classroom. They NEED the routine of in-person school. They NEED to be sent back now!