

# GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

*By Kim Seldomridge*

## Trend Alert: Going Back To School

**COVID19 has had a devastating impact on our lives.** As of today over 640,000 people worldwide have lost their lives to the disease. Some say this number is too high and others say it is way too low. Christians seem divided over the proper response to the virus. Some believe the cure has been worse than the disease. Certainly much anxiety and emotional trauma have resulted from this virus and the response to it. A government report shows nearly ten million people lost their jobs in April after a record 14.6 million were thrown out of work in March underscoring the widespread devastation to the U.S. labor market from the coronavirus. Some people think we are opening the economy too soon while others think we should have never shut it down.

Regardless of what you think there is great angst among parents about the opening of school in the fall. I talked to a parent yesterday who was in tears. "Is my six year old son going to be traumatized by wearing a mask? Both my husband and I work. What are we going to do for childcare if schools go to a hybrid plan? How is my child going to learn if they do online learning?"

This article is an attempt to give you the latest information on what is going on with the schools and options available to parents. By no means is an opinion rendered as to whether public school, private school, charter schools or cyber schools is a better system. Parents should simply be informed to options and possibilities.

I have spent over 35 years in education and have never seen school administrators and school boards so vexed and uncertain as to what direction to take. They have never traveled this path. The guidance coming out of most states, including Pennsylvania where I live, is either impossible to follow or too vague to be any help. Many schools are waiting until August to approve their plans which gives parents very little time to react. The first thing a parent should do is stay tuned to their school district's website. Some plans are up but many are drafts. Consider going to a school board meeting or contacting a school board member or administrator and voicing any concerns you might have.

At this point not much is certain. It is highly likely there will be school in the fall despite the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams saying Tuesday that, despite pressure from the federal government, the country must lower the transmission rate of COVID19 in order to reopen schools. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) made headlines recently



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over its recommendations that students be “physically present in school” as much as safely possible as children’s safety is naturally the highest priority. Teachers’ unions in Wisconsin’s five largest school districts have urged Gov. Tony Evers to keep schools closed at the start of the year amid the coronavirus pandemic. Despite all the political hype most schools will open in the fall. Some schools are going with school as normal (five days a week for all grades). Some are going with hybrid plans where students in certain grades will go to school two days a week and then have online learning two or three days a week. Some schools are doing total online school.

It’s not too early to start thinking of childcare options beyond what you normally do. Some babysitters might cancel on you because they are afraid of getting COVID19. Are there family members you can ask? Are there members in your church community who might be available? Can you organize something within your church? Can you organize something in your neighborhood with other parents? Is a neighborhood co-op feasible? Are there online babysitting services available? You might choose to place an ad on Facebook or Next Door Neighbor. The important thing is to start looking now and line up some options.

So what will things look like in the fall if students go back to regular school? There will be a higher expectation that parents make sure their child is well before sending him to school. Anticipate temperature checks every day. School buses will likely be less crowded as schools expect an increase in the number parents who choose to drive their children to school. Bus routes will be staggered and some routes will be added where possible. In Pennsylvania (as of today) everyone on the bus will be required to wear masks including the driver. Most drivers will have extra masks in case a student forgets theirs. Students with medical conditions will not have to wear masks. Most schools will be enforcing mask wearing through the normal disciplinary process. This in itself will be a challenge because a recent survey done by a local school district asked parents about wearing a mask on the school bus. Twenty five percent of the parents said their child would not ride the bus if masks were required and 25% of the parents said they would

not let their child ride the bus UNLESS masks were required on the bus!

Staff and students will have to wear masks in school unless they can maintain six feet apart. Most schools don’t have enough room to keep desks six feet apart so some students might have to wear their masks most of the day. Due to the recent order by the PA Health Department for face coverings this order applies to all students, staff and visitors age two

and older while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), and intermediate units (IUs) if six feet of distance cannot be maintained. This also means group activities will be severely limited. Most students will stay in their class most of the day and the teacher will move from class to class. Obviously this is not possible with some classes such as biology, chemistry and the technical classes. Many students will be eating their lunch in class while others may be eating in larger spaces such as the gymnasium. Halls might be one way and students will be expected to wear masks in the hallways. If weather permits, consideration could be given to having classes outside. Water fountains are being

replaced by automatic bottle filling stations. All non-essential travel will be eliminated which means no field trips. Schools will limit large gatherings, events, and extracurricular activities to those that can maintain social distancing.

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Another big question concerns fall sports. At the college level the Big Ten and Pac-12 have limited their teams to only league play. At lower collegiate divisions some have canceled all fall competition while others are planning to proceed as scheduled. On the scholastic level fall sports are still a question mark. A final decision is not likely to be made until mid-August. Even though most state sport regulatory bodies may make a recommendation for fall sports it will be up to the individual

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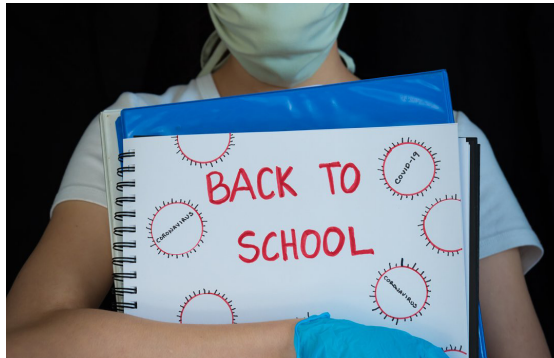
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schools to decide their level of participation. There is the possibility that fall sports will be postponed until the spring. Some schools have already cancelled summer practice.

So what are your options and what do you need to consider? Private school or charter school are possibilities. However many of the health and safety guidelines required by states apply to them as well. Generally charter schools and private schools have more flexibility because they are smaller and they don't have some of the legal restrictions that public schools have as to providing an equal education. The Constitution requires that all children be given equal educational opportunity no matter what. That means if public school districts decide to do online learning they must be sure that every student be provided a computer and have access to the internet. Private schools have a little bit more flexibility.

What about cyber-school? This option generally only works when one parent can stay home with their children to make sure they are doing the work they should be doing and helping them with assignments. If you are interested in cyber-school, Google cyber-schools in your state and several options will come up. Twenty four states provide free cyber-school education. Most of them are high quality programs that provide a diploma when your student graduates.

Home school options are widely available but seldom free. Generally there is a cost to buy curriculum and parents are expected to be closely involved in the process. It is also advisable with either cyber-school or home school that you get your child involved with a co-op to allow interaction with other students. Many states allow your child to participate in extra-curricular activities that are provided by the public school.



Whatever option you choose the most important thing is to communicate to your child that they are going to be all right and to encourage them to learn no matter how the environment they are learning in is different. Growth-minded parents coach and support their children so they can develop and mature. A parent's response to

their child is a key motivator in whether or not children will participate in the risks of learning new skills, acquiring new knowledge, and applying strategies in their life. Parents can ask questions like: *What part of this process has taught you the most? What is this struggle teaching you? You can make positive feedback comments such as: I am proud of you for persevering through this. I recognize the tremendous work that went into this. Thank you. I know that you are feeling discouraged lately. These are some strategies you can try that I think will make a big difference.* Scientists have been able to show just how the brain grows and gets stronger when you learn. So it is important that your child realizes the importance of learning no matter what it looks like.

Last and just as important is to remind your child of the biblical truths that God loves them and is watching over them. Remind them of passages like Philippians 4: 6 – 7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your MINDS in Christ Jesus." After you remind your child, remind yourself.

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