



Be Positively Powerful Resilient When Things Get Tough

Reopen Schools? What Possible Benefit?

Nancy Willard, Director, Embrace Civility

December 21, 2020 — Commentary submitted to Oregonian in response to their [Editorial Opinion](#) encouraging the opening of kindergarten in January.

When I see non-educators argue that kindergartners should return to school during the dark winter wave of this pandemic I truly wonder what alternative universe they are living on.

Kindergartners are truly marvelous beings. They love to learn about the world around them, generally best through hands-on experiences. They love to dance and sing. They love to give and receive hugs. They believe in magic, like Santa Claus. They do not have a significant amount of self control. Nor can they fully understand such things as dangerous invisible viruses.

Every educator wants to return to school. But only when it is safe for them, their students, and the families of their students. It is not safe at this time. If Oregonians want students to return to school, they must be much better at wearing masks, keeping distancing, and avoiding gatherings. The CDC considers an infection rate of 200 cases per 100,000 to be “extreme high risk.” Most Oregon counties are vastly over this level.

It might be helpful to describe the environment kindergartners would face if they returned to school.

Only a small number of students would be able to be in a classroom at any time, perhaps half of a class. The other half would be stuck at home with no instruction or worse—forced to watch hours of live streamed videos.

Students would be required to sit for hours at desks in 35 foot safety “bubbles,” wearing masks. No getting up to take a break or move their little bodies. When they are at recess, they would be required to keep proper distance. Eating would be at their desk, sitting straight, with no talking—as they would not be wearing masks.

Teachers would have to teach from the front of the class, using a screen so that the students sitting in the back would be able to see. No cuddling on the rug to listen to the teacher read a book and sing songs.

Teachers who have prepared their classes for a return have been forced to store or throw away thousands of dollars of fun books, manipulatives, toys, and instruments. Students would not be able to touch anything that any other student had touched.

Teachers would not be able to hold a child’s hand to help them cut with scissors. Or write with a pencil. Teachers could not tie their shoes. Or zip their coat. Or comfort them when they are crying.

There would be clear health and safety risks. Perhaps not for the teachers, if they stay a safe distance and wear a mask—and if the school has upgraded its ventilation system. The greatest health risk would be for the families of the students.

It has been found that one third of children who are infected with covid-19 do not show symptoms. So any day, a child could come to class able to infect others, with no warning or signs. As it is quite certain that kindergartners will not consistently stay in their seats, maintain an appropriate distance, and wear their mask, other children could easily become infected and also not show symptoms.

If you send your child to school at this time, your entire family would be at high risk. It is imperative to ensure that your child has absolutely no contact with any family member who is at higher risk. Their life would be in danger.

Infections would be inevitable at school. The impact would be highly distressing and disruptive. You could find out at 8 in the morning that school has been cancelled and your child is in quarantine. Forget any plans you had. It will take some time for effective distance learning to be restarted.

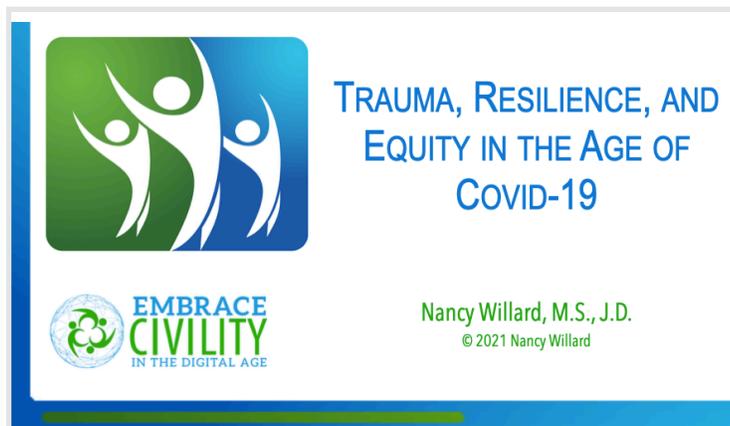
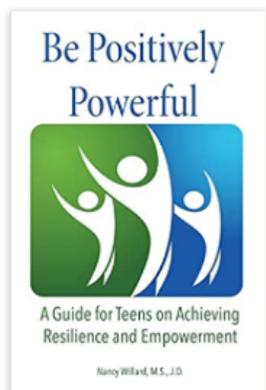
Your entire family would spend the next 10 days worrying whether your child was exposed and if your child exposed you. If you are working out of the home, you should tell your employer because there is a risk you have been exposed and could start a workplace outbreak.

If your child does get sick, they would stay in self-isolation. Alone in their room for 10 days, with meals delivered at their door. No close contact with any family member.

My question for editorial boards and policy makers: What possible benefit do you expect to obtain?

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., is the director of [Embrace Civility](#). She is the author of *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*, *Be Positively Powerful: A Guide for Teens on Achieving Resilience and Empowerment*, and *Be Positively Powerful: Resilient When Things Get Tough*.

Her new three video series for professional Development, *Trauma, Resilience, and Equity in the Age of Covid-19* and resources for educators on addressing trauma and toxic stress during the Covid-19 pandemic are on her [Be Positively Powerful](#) website.



Contact

Websites: <http://bepositivelypowerful.com> and <http://embracecivility.org>.

Email: nwillard@embracecivility.org.

Cell: 541-556-1145 (Pacific time)