

April 17, 2020

To:

Dr. Walt Griffin
Superintendent
Seminole County Public Schools
400 East Lake Mary Blvd.
Sanford, FL 32773



Dear Dr. Griffin:

The safety and well-being of all of Seminole County's families are of the utmost importance, and I appreciate the leadership you have taken to ensure safety of our students and our public-school educators.

On behalf of the members of the Seminole Education Association, I am requesting that we keep school campuses closed for the remainder of the school year. In the past three weeks, teachers have been asked to rethink, refocus and redirect their classroom instruction for students through distance learning. Our teachers have risen to the challenge and will continue to do so through the end of May.

We are aware that our public schools serve much more than simply a classroom for learning. As much as our students and educators want the opportunity to return to normal, and, be back in our schools, returning prematurely will threaten the safety and wellbeing of all in the SCPS family. Social distancing does not happen when schools are in session, as is apparent in any kindergarten classroom, middle school cafeteria or high school hallway.

A premature school opening would endanger Seminole's educators and cause a panic in the entire community if even one case of COVID-19 were to be discovered at even one school. This would cause a public distrust of Seminole County's Public Schools. This is a huge and unnecessary risk to take.

In the past four weeks, I have spoken with hundreds of our teachers, who have told me that they would not be able to return to the schools in May due to high risk health factors of their families and of themselves. SCPS has long had substitute teacher shortages and attempting to cover 20% of our absentees on a daily basis would be both impractical and increase the health risk to our students and employees.

We do not know, at this moment, enough about COVID-19 to risk opening the schools this year. Science and history have proven that such pandemics come in waves and Florida has not peaked in this current wave. According to a study from Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center for Families and Children, (2018) Florida has 2.6 million people (or 12.9% of the population) without health insurance. To place our students who do not have access to basic healthcare in danger would be irresponsible. We have no idea how many cases of COVID-19 are in Seminole County – we only know how many have tested positive for the virus.

Although distance learning, as we are presently implementing in Seminole County, is not a "Best Practice" in education, it is a safe practice. In a global society, public health must prioritize over all else. Now is the time to listen to medical experts and not politicians. We need to give assurance to all in the SCPS's family and not continue to provide uncertainty.

Dr. Griffin, now is the time to assure Seminole County's families and employees that school campuses will be closed to students for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. Now is the time for Seminole County's School Board to inform Governor DeSantis that it is in the best interest of its citizens that he declare that schools will remain closed to students for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

Sincerely,

Dan Smith
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