



Physical Safety Versus Emotional Safety: The Difficult Position of Parents During the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Educator Barnes – September 30, 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has changed the way students are educated in schools. When school buildings closed across the nation during the end of last school year, students were forced to shift from in-person learning to remote learning. For some students, remote

learning was completing packets, and for others, it was e-learning. This school year, as the pandemic continues, schools have tried to improve the educational format. This leads to tough choices for parents.

Some schools are offering both in-person and remote education online and leaving the choice up to the families. On one hand, this gives parents more autonomy in choosing the best education for their children, but on the other hand, the choices can both have cons. My husband and I found ourselves in this situation.

Our sons have attended the same elementary school in Washington Township since kindergarten. Overall, we like their school, although there have been a few teachers who were not the best for our children. This school year, our twin sons are in fourth grade, and it was the first school year where our sons had a Black teacher. Every few months, someone asks on social media, "When did you have your first Black teacher?" The replies are disappointing. On top of this, she is an excellent teacher. Since Washington Township reopened 100% remotely, my husband and I have been able to watch her teach. Most importantly, our sons love her.

Now, after fall break, all Washington Township elementary students can return in-person. This is when the argument in my home began. What was most important to me is that our sons stayed with their teacher. My husband's priority was keeping them safe and limiting their potential exposure to the coronavirus. Although I shared his concerns, I work in a school where some of our students are on campus. I have seen firsthand how a school can work in-person during this pandemic. That was not a strong enough rebuttal for my husband.

We had no way of knowing if our sons' teacher would be the remote teacher or the in-person teacher before we made the decision. My husband asked, "How would you feel if they got sick or worse?" How do I argue with that? My husband is right; our kids tend to get sick a lot. We decided to keep our children remote. This worried me because I knew their emotional health and joy had improved with their 4th grade teacher. We would have to wait to find out if she would remain their teacher.

Remote learning was a hard adjustment when this school year began because the workload increased from remote learning in the spring, but it has positively benefited our children. They are more independent and have learned to advocate for themselves more when they need help. Being at home has allowed them to have a longer recess than they would have in-person, and they are happy. They do miss their friends, but they have enjoyed learning from

home and they had straight As on their midterms, and we expect they will have those same grades at the end of this quarter.

This week, we learned their teacher would be their remote teacher. I also think about their classmates who are now switching teachers because their parents chose to send them back in-person, and their teacher will not be the in-person teacher. How will they adjust to a new teacher?

One of my sons ended last school year on a negative note because of his teacher. It was so negative that when his 3rd grade teacher sent him a video through his current teacher, we did not show it to him. My biggest fear was that they would have to adjust again. When students don't mesh well with a teacher, they have a hard time learning from that teacher. I wonder how students' learning will be impacted if they have to change teachers.

This is the situation many parents are in. Parents don't have easy choices. Some parents are sending their children back when they fear for their safety but their children are not being successful at home. I'm glad it worked out for the second quarter for us. In November, we have to decide again. Based on the number of parents who change their choice, their teacher could potentially change. I hope it doesn't. I don't know what the answer is. I know this is putting a strain on teachers. They don't want to switch students either and start over with relationship building with a new set of children.

My advice to parents is to follow your gut and go with the decision you can live with. If parents have to make the decision with another adult, they should find a time to talk about it to share fears and concerns. Parents shouldn't feel obligated to solve this problem in one setting. We took at least a month.

Parents want their children to be emotionally well, physically well, and academically well. With the coronavirus pandemic, it may be hard to have all three.