

This has been a difficult time. There are plenty of us who are sick of hearing the “p” word, sick of the phrase “the new normal” and sick of having every aspect of our lives turned upside down. We are so done with it all.

As president of the Hollister Elementary School Teachers Association, I have heard the same thing from our teachers. So frustrated with the inability to reach our students through the screen, we have considered whether we should just request to return to in-person learning. We are adapting how we figure out if our lessons are landing and our students are learning. We are figuring out which of the tools are giving us the best outcomes. We are exhausted from tracking who got bounced from which lessons and which students with alternative needs still need services provided because of it. Foremost in our mind is trying to gauge how hard to push our students in a digital environment when we aren’t sure how their home life may be affected right now. Have grown-ups lost jobs? Is anyone sick? Is the home stress level getting too high?

Yet with all of our frustration, worry, and fatigue, we know the alternative is unacceptable. One of the largest pieces to the puzzle of successful academics is consistency. Students need to practice daily. They need to interact with others. But mostly, they need the safety of predictable schedules and routines. The greatest killer to learning is anxiety and stress. It distracts us from committing new information to memory. It helps us forget negative experiences and with it the learning that may have taken place. Moving to a hybrid schedule too soon would destroy any semblance of consistency. Students and teachers would always be anxious about being sent home. Imagine that we return to in-person learning. A child in your child’s class tests positive for COVID-19. Now, that entire class and every person that child had contact with is quarantined for 14 days, plus they will all need a negative test to return. But what about the siblings of the children in that class? Now, their classes are quarantined until the negative tests come back. And working parents now have to quarantine from work. We are so interconnected through schools that any exposure creates a snowball effect. Now imagine all of this with the knowledge we are a month from flu season. Every headache, every cough, every temperature would trigger a quarantine. Consistency would absolutely be destroyed and with it the best opportunity to capture the greatest amount of learning as we can this year.

There was a push at the beginning of the year to open in a hybrid model. If we had done that, students at Sunnyslope, R.O. Hardin, Rancho San Justo, Marguerite Maze, Ladd Lane, and HDLA with Gabilan Hills would have already lost learning due to students testing positive for COVID and having to switch from a hybrid model to distance learning and back. And that is with students home. There would be more closures in-person as siblings at Rancho and Maze would carry the virus to their siblings at Calaveras and Cerra Vista. As hard as this is, the Hollister School District Board of Trustees made the right decision in choosing the model that offers students the most consistency for their learning not to mention their parents. It would be far too difficult for working parents to turn on a dime to accommodate their student’s quarantine.

Yet with all of this, the greatest worry our teachers have (excluding our own potential demise) is that one of our students will carry with them the feeling they are responsible if one of their loved ones contracts COVID and dies. It won’t matter how many times we tell them that it

was not their fault. Kids are kids. They will believe they brought it home from school. This is why the Hollister Elementary School Teachers Association is in line with our Board of Trustees' decision to extend distance learning until January. Because we can help them through distance learning, but there wouldn't be enough we could do to help them through that kind of loss.