From: Natalie Furniss
To: letstalk
Subject: Vaccination of Teachers
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I cannot imagine the burden placed on the shoulders of those in official positions. I know choosing between health and safety or quality education seems impossible and we have been leaning heavily toward health and safety by making the best of virtual learning.

I am a mother of two young boys, a kindergartener and 3rd grader, in Buncombe County who have been mostly virtual schooling since March 2020. Our school board has recently voted to remain in virtual learning until at least February 12th pending a February 4th evaluation. I am not optimistic about the February ruling since Buncombe county already has a wait list of over 15,000 residents in the above 65 category who are approved for vaccines.

Although I can completely sympathize with the reasoning behind prioritizing our older demographic, I do not understand why teachers were not included in the essential workers category. I have many family members who are in the 65+ age group and I will be delighted to have them receive vaccinations, but all of those members are retired and fully able to quarantine with relatively little impact to their overall quality of life. In fact, several of those eligible in my personal circle are choosing NOT to get the vaccine because they feel that they are so able to quarantine and “wait it out.” I do not agree with this strategy, but I also cannot overrule their personal choice. The point I am trying to make is that although ages 65+ are of higher risk, they are in a lifestyle position that would allow them to wait for greater vaccine supply.

What I would like to have explained is why teachers are not receiving priority vaccination scheduling?

In September of last year, I wrote another letter to our school board begging them to please allow students *some* in-person learning opportunities. The argument against in-person learning was the health risk of the teachers and administrators. There was also great concern about staffing shortages should an outbreak occur. However, with an overwhelming urge to compromise, they soon changed from all-virtual to a hybrid learning system allowing students to go in person for 2 days a week. Since that time and to my knowledge, our school has had zero Covid cases related to in-person learning. In our county, the covid cases that caused concern in schools resided with infected staff members and parents, not with students (at least in elementary schools, to my knowledge).

The education of our students is one of the most essential tasks facing our country other than the healthcare industry. Not only would this allow schools to have a greater chance of reopening, but it will also foster an economic boost allowing working parents the ability to

function on a normal schedule once again. Our vaccine resources are limited and those with greatest exposure risk did and do need first priority, but I believe we now have the opportunity to consider the economy over age; education over age; our children over age.

If there is a legitimate reason behind the prioritization of vaccine supply that I have not considered, please let me know. To clarify, I am not a teacher. I am not advocating for my own priority scheduling; I am in-fact, the last group to qualify considering my age and exposure risk. I am also a stay-at-home mother who has the luxury of fostering the best learning environment for her children under the circumstances. I am not advocating on my behalf, but rather on the behalf of our students, our parents, our teachers, and our economy.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Natalie Furniss