

**Opening Statement of
Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
CPAC Subcommittee Hearing on
“Kids Online During COVID: Child Safety in an
Increasingly Digital Age”**

March 11, 2021

As Prepared for Delivery

INTRO

Good morning and welcome.

Our discussion today is one especially important to me, not just as a Member of Congress, but as a mom.

We need to leave politics at the door and have a serious discussion about what is happening to our kids online...

... their mental health and safety...

... and what needs to happen to reopen schools immediately.

SCHOOLS

Yesterday, we heard from four doctors who wrote in USA TODAY.

Quote: “keeping schools closed or even partially closed, based on what we know now, is harming our children.”

They said the Biden administration misinterpreted their research and science when creating the CDC guidance...

... and it ultimately led to harmful policy that hamstrung states to reopen schools quickly.

SCIENCE

The science is clear.

Viral transmission is minimal in schools. Children are not a significant risk either of poor outcomes from COVID-19.

It's time to reopen immediately and listen to the experts who are saying loud and clear, follow the science.... school closures are harming children.

It's more than just a homework gap. There are serious health and mental risks associated with our children spending more time online.

These are stories, I'm hearing from parents who are pleading for schools to reopen.

I hear this every day.

Our kids aren't active.

They are not engaged and falling asleep during remote school.

They are isolated... suicide and overdose risks are going up.

And as children spend more time online, they are more at risk to online predators.

This has all happened in my community and I know we aren't alone.

The science tells us all these risks of despair far outweigh COVID-19 in schools.

MORE HEALTH EXPERTS

In addition to USA Today, I encourage everyone to also read a piece from the New York Times.

It documents scientific insight from health professionals.

Here's what one pediatrician from San Francisco said:

“We are witnessing a significant public health crisis in our children, who are experiencing unprecedented mental illness and physical ailments during this time.

This would be mitigated, if not completely alleviated, by in-person schooling.” End quote.

I understand that our focus today is child safety in an increasingly digital age.

For the safety of our children, surely we can all agree **science**—not **fear**—should dictate how we protect them and build a better future....

... **A future with hope.**

We can mitigate a lot of the harms and risks we are talking about today by not letting another day go by of school closures.

That’s what will give our children the best chance to succeed and thrive in life.

PROTECTING ONLINE

Now, specifically regarding their protection online...

I am always open to updating and modernizing our laws.

I’m committed to bipartisan work for data and privacy protections, especially children’s privacy.

I sincerely hope those efforts resume soon....

... and this committee does the hard work of legislating in a bipartisan way again.

WIN THE FUTURE

As we look to the future of building a better world for the next generation, I want to be clear.

America can lead a new era of technological innovation.

We must lead with our values for freedom, human rights, and human dignity.

But we are failing with closed schools and this year long experiment of remote learning, more screen time, and more isolation.

Technology should add to education. It's not a substitute for everyday learning.

It's not a substitute period. Reopening for in-person learning doesn't mean two days a week.

It means five days—with both the teacher and children in the classroom together.

Before the President's address tonight, we should all be asking why isn't more being done to reopen.

Just as the doctors wrote in USA Today, this is a human rights issue.

Let's open the doors of our schools and let our kids learn and thrive again.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I ask Unanimous Consent to include both articles I mentioned in the record.