

State superintendent candidates slam one another over in-person instruction

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State superintendent candidate Deb Kerr called for all K-12 schools to reopen for in-person instruction, claiming “the science is clear” such a move is kids’ best interest.

Meanwhile, Kerr’s opponent Jill Underly slammed her for lying about the science behind reopening schools.

At a Saturday news conference on the Capitol steps, Kerr warned the future of Wisconsin schools is on the line in the spring election. She said organizations like the Centers for Disease Control back her recommendations for returning to in-person schooling and knocked her opponent Jill Underly for not having a plan.

A New York Times analysis this month found that only 4 percent of school districts nationwide have low enough COVID-19 community transmission to safely hold full-time in-person classes.

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“We need our schools to open because we know our schools are the safest place for our students to be,” Kerr told reporters. “Excuses mean we are not doing enough for our kids. It’s time to get our kids back to school.”

Additionally, she said she wouldn’t adhere to “Madison bureaucracy” and would fight to give every school the resources it needs to fully reopen, including a call for the state to spend its federal COVID relief dollars on reopening schools.

Underly in a virtual press conference Saturday after Kerr’s event said Kerr was “pandering for political purposes” when she said scientific evidence shows schools

can reopen for in-person classes safely.

The Pecatonica School District superintendent said forcing schools to open that are not able to implement social distancing guidelines is wrong and puts kids and teachers at risk.

“Kerr clearly did not read the research and she is lying about what it says,” Underly said. “Forcing schools to reopen for in-person learning is simply irresponsible and wrong.”

She said those schools need to figure out for themselves if they have the necessary safety precautions such as adequate ventilation, PPE, contact tracing and mask requirements to open for in-person classes, not the state government.

Underly said she expects all schools in Wisconsin to reopen by fall semester of this year.

Kerr’s comments come on the one-year anniversary of Gov. Tony Evers’ first mandate to close all public and private K-12 schools for two weeks in an attempt to help prevent the spread of coronavirus in the state.

At the time, public health officials had reported 19 total cases of COVID-19 in the state. As of Saturday, the Department of Health Services has noted 569,364 total positive cases, with a seven-day average for daily confirmed cases at 428 and 6,538 total deaths.

The former Brown Deer school superintendent highlighted the school closing anniversary and likened the Capitol, which is currently closed to the public, to schools still operating virtually.

“It was about the safety and wellbeing of our students, families and teachers,” she said. “We have learned a lot over this last year. I agree with Gov. Evers we must follow the science. The science is clear ... that schools must open now.”