



April 28, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my support for the RESTART S.M.A.R.T proposal for reopening Arizona schools. Due to the impact of COVID-19 closures, a possible financial collapse of the economy, the grief of loved ones who have been infected by the virus, or those who have recently died from the virus has

impacted children's ability to cope with the dramatic and debilitating shift in our education system. As a trauma expert and researcher, I realized that in the K-12 education profession we did not do a great job of addressing and focusing on repairing the systemic issues on traumatic stress among students and educators. It is my concern that if we don't learn from our historical mistakes, we will continue to repeat them. This pandemic has caused major disruption on our daily routines in education to the point that redefining, redeveloping, and recalibrating how we foster healing, and academic learning for the total individual whether it's the student, staff, or parent is essential to how we start and prepare for the new school season this fall. Restarting the traditional in-person school season without addressing, assessing and re-evaluating the negative impacts of the pandemic, financial crisis, traumatic stress, and teacher burnout while endeavoring to go straight to academic instruction would be a serious mistake.

Trauma is no longer just an inconvenience in education. Trauma is an Academic Crisis for students and an Occupational Hazard of the school staff. Over 70% of Americans have experienced some type of Early Childhood Trauma. In a study, two-thirds of the children reportedly experienced at least one traumatic event by age 16, including 30.8% with exposure to one event and 37% to multiple events. Trauma impacts teacher and staff attrition. First-year teachers that graduate from college are overwhelmed with Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue and resign and leave the education profession in 3-5 years. Trauma has been the culprit when reviewing special ed, referrals, suspensions, and mental illness in education. Trauma doesn't just have a mental, social, and emotional cost, but to ignore trauma and its impact is fiscally irresponsible. Trauma costs our country \$671 billion each year.

Trauma not only negatively impacts the brain but it also re-wires the brain. When children's safety has been compromised or jeopardized the brain is on high alert creating hyper-sensitivity and hyper-vigilance. This also makes children be in a Fight, Flight, or Freeze mode which impacts cognitive functioning in the prefrontal cortex of the brain which makes learning in the classroom and behaving exceedingly difficult. This explains why it is important when starting the new school season this fall, that we spend the first few weeks addressing trauma and chronic stress before starting academic learning. If children lack executive and cognitive functioning, there will be little to no learning at all.

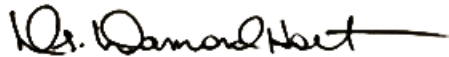
This is why I'm in support of the RESTART S.T.A.R.T., because it's about creating a comprehensive policy that is not reactive but more proactive in regards to how we start the new school season and how we address the social-emotional needs of our children and staff in

education. Our focus should be on the 3 C's to social-emotional learning and trauma. We must focus on CARE, and CONNECTION before CURRICULUM.

1. CARE is important. the brain is stimulated for learning when kids are not concerned about their safety.
2. CONNECTION is essential. The science and data show that when classrooms are filled with loving spaces of relationships and attachments, students and teachers perform more efficiently as a community. If you can't Reach Kids, you certainly can't Teach Kids!
3. CURRICULUM must be equitable for all kids. To be trauma-responsive also means that instruction and pedagogy must be anchored in trauma-sensitivity, equity, culturally responsive instruction, relationships, and attachments to empower learning in the classrooms and to improve the opportunity gap.

I call upon all the powers that be in education to support this initiative. I ask all leaders, governing boards, superintendents, local and state officials to accept and adopt this plan of action as your policy for the next steps and immediate implementation for your school district and schools.

Dedicated to Public Service,



Da'Mond T Holt, PhD

Certified Traumatologist, Mental Health Specialist