

## FALL IS COMING!

### **Our Students Need Online Options Now.**

By Letrisha Weber, Chair, Public School Options - Indiana Chapter

The last few months of at-home learning have given most parents a newfound respect for classroom teachers. But soon, many Indiana teachers will be returning to their school buildings for the new school year. Have their schools taken the necessary measures to both protect students and staff and ensure quality instruction? That remains to be seen and, for many parents, the uncertainty is too much to bear.

**While we still have time, we need to be preparing additional choices for parents who may not be comfortable sending their children back to school.** That includes removing barriers in the law and providing adequate funding to make as many “online seats” at virtual schools available as possible.

As the parent of students who attend online schools, I can attest to the fact that these schools, some of which have been operating for more than a decade, are not merely ready to meet the challenge; they are ready to thrive. **Parents deserve to have more access to these experienced options**, especially as traditional schools scramble to find the right equipment and retrain their faculty.

A recent National Coalition for Public School Options poll found that **up to one in five students who attended brick-and-mortar schools in March are unlikely to return in the Fall.** That means roughly 10 million K-12 students will depend on educational options, including full-time online schools. When we have that many students depending on getting their education over the Internet, **we must not let online learning become an afterthought.**

For some, online learning just makes the most sense. The poll cited above also found that **80 percent of parents were satisfied with online transition**, and **40 percent would consider continuing online this fall.** Shouldn't they be able to make that choice for themselves? **As demand for online learning grows, legislation must change with it.** We need to do away with arbitrary barriers that make it difficult for parents and students to make an informed and fair choice in the age of the coronavirus.

**The knowledge and experience that online schools have is important to parents, and we need our leaders to recognize the good they can do for our students.** Instead of restricting access to online learning, legislators should work to expand resources for full-time online schools. Unless we take action now, our nation's online learning options will inevitably fall behind what's needed.