



August 3, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Room 225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg PA, 17120

The Honorable Pedro Rivera
Secretary of Education
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Tenth Floor, 333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Gov. Wolf and Secretary Rivera:

Today, we write on behalf of the members we represent to share our deep concerns about the state of reopening plans school entities are required to adopt in order to return some or all of their students to school for in-person instruction this year.

Specifically, it is essential that the commonwealth issue clear, science-based directives to all school entities that include a precise metric of COVID-19 cases indicating when schools should close for in-person instruction and offer online instruction to students. As you know, cases of COVID-19 continue to increase statewide. In many counties, cases are increasing at a faster rate than the statewide numbers.

In addition, we ask that you step in immediately and provide clear, enforceable directives to all public schools for the reopening of schools related to whether or under what circumstances they should open for in-person instruction, 6-foot social distancing requirements, the wearing of face coverings, sanitization protocols, school closure protocols for school entities to use when a case of COVID-19 is reported, and the conduct of fall sports.

Right now, school entities are making decisions that are not uniform. Some, including the City of Philadelphia School District, are offering online instruction only. Others are embracing a hybrid model. Still others plan to bring all students to school for in-person instruction.

Just as alarming, there continue to be broad disagreements about social distancing rules in school buildings. The state guidance, which recommends 6 feet of social distancing “to every extent possible,” has prompted many school entities to suggest that 3 feet of distance is acceptable, even though this defies nearly every federal and state recommendation for distancing rules.

Pennsylvania’s confirmed daily cases of COVID-19 are now at levels similar to those we saw in April, when every non-essential business was shuttered, schools were closed for in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, and Pennsylvania’s citizens were under clear “stay at home” orders.

This simple fact shows that it is absolutely essential that the commonwealth issue clear, statewide directives about:

1. Whether or under what circumstances school entities should not open for in-person instruction and, instead, provide online instruction to students, based on the number of COVID-19 cases reported in Pennsylvania or on a county-by-county basis. This directive should include a clear, science-based metric identifying the number or percentage of cases that, when the state or any county exceeds that metric, should require that schools be closed for in-person instruction.
2. Requiring and enforcing 6 feet of social distance between any persons in a school building, if school entities reopen for in-person instruction.
3. Requiring and enforcing the wearing of face coverings for persons in a school building, if school entities reopen for in-person instruction.
4. Requiring and enforcing clear sanitization rules for school entities that reopen for in-person instruction.
5. Setting forth and enforcing clear rules about steps a school entity should take to close school buildings or parts of school buildings if and when a student, staff member, or family of a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19.
6. Setting forth clear rules for fall sports that are not in conflict with other reopening guidelines.

Clear, statewide rules on each of these issues are fundamental for planning for what school will look like in the 2020-21 school year. The absence of clear, statewide rules on these issues has led to confusion, widely divergent approaches to reopening plans, and anxiety on the part of students, parents, and school staff members. We need these directives immediately.

Time is running out to finalize plans for the upcoming school year. Without these kinds of clear, statewide rules, we simply can't be certain that the students, staff members, and families we are privileged to serve in public education can return to school safely.

We await your response.

Sincerely,

Pennsylvania State Education Association

Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials

Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools

Pennsylvania Principals Association

Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators