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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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January 5, 2021

Dear Superintendents, Charter Leaders, School Boards, DSEA Executive Team, and PTA Leaders,

Thank you for your efforts to continue educating our children during this very challenging time.

As you know, in early December, we recommended that those districts, charters, and schools facing operational challenges take a “pause” from December 14 through January 8. Many of you followed this recommendation, and we hope this period of fully remote instruction combined with the winter holidays has given teachers and administrators a chance to recharge, reorganize, and get ready for the rest of the school year.

The Department of Education and the Division of Public Health have used this time to do just that. We’d like to review the steps we’ve taken over the past four weeks, and explain **why we feel strongly that it is time to return to hybrid instruction on January 11.**

Throughout this pause:

- The Department of Education held 20 separate meetings with superintendents and teacher representatives in every district, as well as charter school representatives, to hear feedback on the challenges they face.
- The Department of Education and the Office of the Governor have reviewed dozens of emails from educators across the state who shared their experiences teaching during the pandemic.
- The Division of Public Health and Department of Education issued an FAQ document and held a webinar and office hours for school nurses to review updated procedures.
- The Office of the Governor, the Division of Public Health, and the Department of Education, met several times with every superintendent in the state, along with charter and private school representatives, to hear their concerns and answer questions.

In addition to the above efforts, the CDC revised its quarantine guidelines in a way that will reduce the operational burden on schools. Previously, school personnel coming into close contact with a positive COVID case needed to quarantine for 14 days. By January 11, that period will have been shortened to 10 days, or 7 days with a negative test on day 5 or later. This means that school

personnel will be able to return to work in half the time, which should mitigate the staffing shortages that forced many schools to shift to fully remote instruction.

During this pause, we asked educators this direct question: what do you need to feel safe going back to the classroom?

The request we heard repeated most often was for more transparent and reliable communication about the conditions in their schools. Here's what we've done in response:

- The Department of Justice hosted a meeting with attorneys for each district and for the DSEA to review the law around data-sharing in order to promote greater data transparency.
- We have dramatically expanded the school-based data displayed on My Healthy Community. The data now includes the following:
 - The numbers of positive in-school while contagious cases by district, updated weekly.
 - The number of positive in-school while contagious cases statewide compared to the number of students engaged in in-person instruction, updated weekly.
- We will be updating the information our epidemiologists collect from school nurses to ensure the Division of Public Health is alerted to any potential instances of in-school spread.

We are working with districts, charters, and private and parochial schools to ensure teachers and school personnel are vaccinated as soon as possible. That said, this process won't happen overnight, and we do not believe waiting until then to return to in-person instruction is advisable. The risk of contracting the virus in school is low compared to the risks students face not being in school. The American Academy of Pediatrics and others have repeatedly pointed to the negative effects on children – especially our most vulnerable children – when they aren't able to attend school in person. In addition to the more robust and engaging instruction that in-person learning allows, many students rely on schools for meals, counseling, and social and emotional support.

On December 15, the CDC released the results of a [study](#) of schools in Mississippi. The results were definitive and reflect what we've seen on the ground here in Delaware: schools are not a significant source of COVID spread. According to the study, compared with children who tested negative for COVID, children who tested positive were more likely to have attended playdates, parties, weddings and funerals. They were NOT more likely to have attended child care or school in person.

In Delaware, our epidemiologists have seen the same thing, as can be seen on our new data dashboard. It's a testament to the hard work of students, educators and staff that the number of COVID-positive students and staff is so low. Moreover, data from our epidemiologists shows that the vast majority of cases affecting students and staff originated outside of the school building. The few cases thought to result from in-school spread are frequently observed to be in settings where mask-wearing was not consistently practiced.

As we have said many times, we do not believe there is a public health reason to close schools. We have spent the past four weeks helping schools try to address the operational challenges they are experiencing. And we can all agree that students learn best when they're in school.

For all these reasons, **we are recommending that districts and schools make every effort to return to hybrid learning on January 11.** We recognize that some districts may still be experiencing operational challenges, so we are presenting the following models to choose from as you bring students back for in-person learning. **Absent operational concerns, the recommendation of the Division of Public Health and the Office of the Governor is to follow Option 1:**

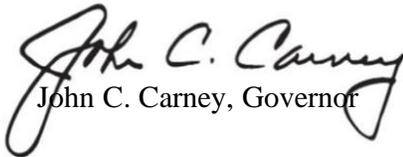
Option 1: Return all students to hybrid learning (in-person instruction with social distancing; remote option for those who want or need it).

Option 2: Shift high schools to fully remote. Return elementary and middle schools to hybrid learning.

Option 3: Shift high schools and middle schools to fully remote. Return elementary schools, students with special needs, English learners, low-income students, and students with internet connectivity challenges to hybrid learning.

This is a challenging time. Educators, school personnel, and school and district leaders have done an extraordinary job keeping schools safe and ensuring children are fed, cared for, and educated. On behalf of our state, thank you for what you do each and every day.

Sincerely,



John C. Carney, Governor



Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director of the Division of Public Health



Dr. Susan Bunting, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Education