



PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION of TEACHERS

PFT Member Feedback Regarding Reopening Schools | July 28, 2020

Survey Completed by 7,567 PFT members between July 22-28, 2020

Section 1: Introduction

Background

Over the course of the COVID-19 crisis, we have conducted four membership surveys and have used every survey as a means of gauging member feedback and developing our union positions. Combined with our first three surveys, this current survey represents over 25,000 member survey submissions since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the release of our prior report, **three major factors have shifted the trajectory of reopening efforts:**

1. Virus Trajectory

We've seen national surges in cases, an uptick in statewide cases, and a plateauing of local cases. Without a sustained positivity rate of lower than 5%--which Philadelphia is currently exceeding--combined with a sustained reproduction rate of lower than 1, it will be unsafe for buildings to reopen. These metrics must be the foundation of decision making.

2. The District's Plan

The School District of Philadelphia released a plan that is not aligned with our reopening requirements. With significant discrepancies with our requirements and their proposed reopening model, our leadership and rank and file membership alike had significant concerns regarding moving forward.

3. Lack of Funding

Thus far, Congress has failed to pass the HEROES act which would bring \$3B in urgently needed education funding to Pennsylvania. The President and his Secretary of Education have threatened to withhold funding and have weaponized reopening efforts in an attempt to implement their misguided voucher agenda. Their morally bankrupt rhetoric has only served to ratchet up local and national fear around reopening.

These components have increased the already extreme trepidation regarding reopening. Further, without the proper implementation of the requirements of our plan, reopening with the hybrid model as currently proposed is not a viable option.

Results Overview

Of the respondents, 73.6% feel personally unsafe entering school buildings. Only 8% said they feel safe, while 18% are not sure yet.

An even greater percentage of respondents, 78%, feel that their students' safety is jeopardized by entering school buildings. Only 6% felt it would be safe for their students to enter buildings, while 16% were unsure.

Over half of respondents (53.6%) feel that fully remote is the safest and best option given what we now know, while 26.7% are in favor of nearly fully remote with very limited exceptions.

We believe that a full return to virtual learning for the first quarter, at minimum, is warranted. This is not a position we take lightly. Our members want to be in buildings doing the jobs they love—and they want to do so when it is safe to do so. Our children learn best in face to face environments, but we cannot compromise the physical safety of the students and staff in order to do so.

Section 2: Findings

Our report outlines the feedback of our membership in an online survey conducted between July 22-28 and represents the insight of 7,567 active PFT members, with additional results still coming in.

The survey was constructed as follows:

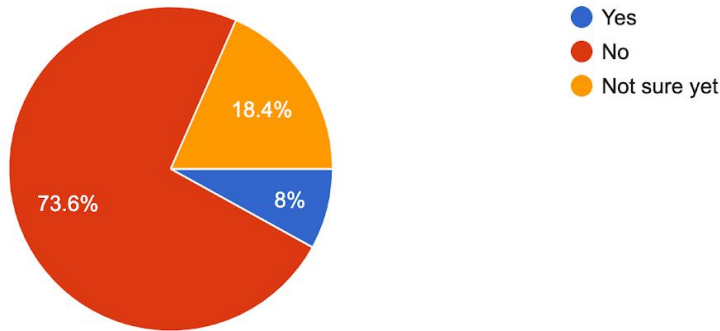
- Members replied to two yes/no/unsure questions regarding safety.
- Members replied to a multiple-choice question about reopening models.
- Members replied to a series of sliding scale questions outlining how they came to their conclusions.
- Members provided optional open feedback.

Section 2a: Safety Yes/No Questions

i. A mere 8% of our members feel personally safe re-entering school buildings as currently proposed in the District's reopening model. 18% are unsure, and an overwhelming 73.6% feel unsafe in the current model.

Do you feel personally safe re-entering school buildings in the hybrid model proposed by the District?

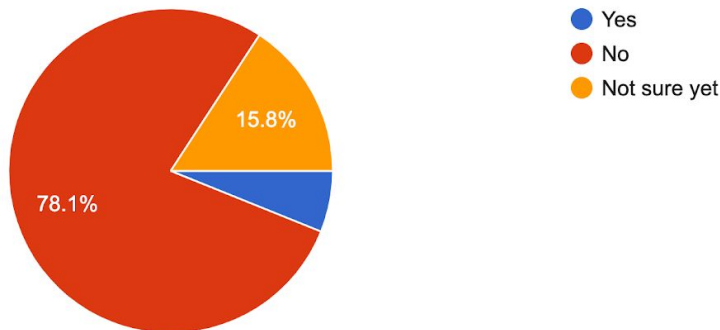
7,567 responses



ii. An even greater percentage of our membership, 78%, feels that their students will be unsafe reentering school buildings. Only 6% of members feel that their students would be safe upon reentering buildings.

Do you feel your students will be safe re-entering school buildings in the hybrid model proposed by the District?

7,567 responses

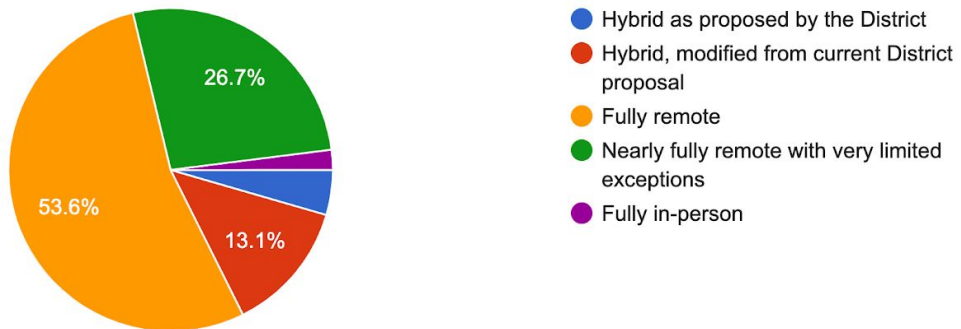


Section 2b: School Reopening Model Question

i. Over 80% of our members support a fully or nearly fully remote learning model (with 53.6% urging for a fully remote model). Only 2% of respondents are in favor of a fully in person model, and less than 5% are in favor of the District's proposed model.

What do you believe is the most appropriate reopening model given what we know now?

7,567 responses



Section 2c: Sliding Scale Questions

Members were then asked for their rationale behind the answers they provided, using a sliding scale. The vast majority of members indicated that the science of the virus; the health of their students, themselves, and their loved ones; the District's plan as currently written; and the lack of funding all play a significant role in their responses.

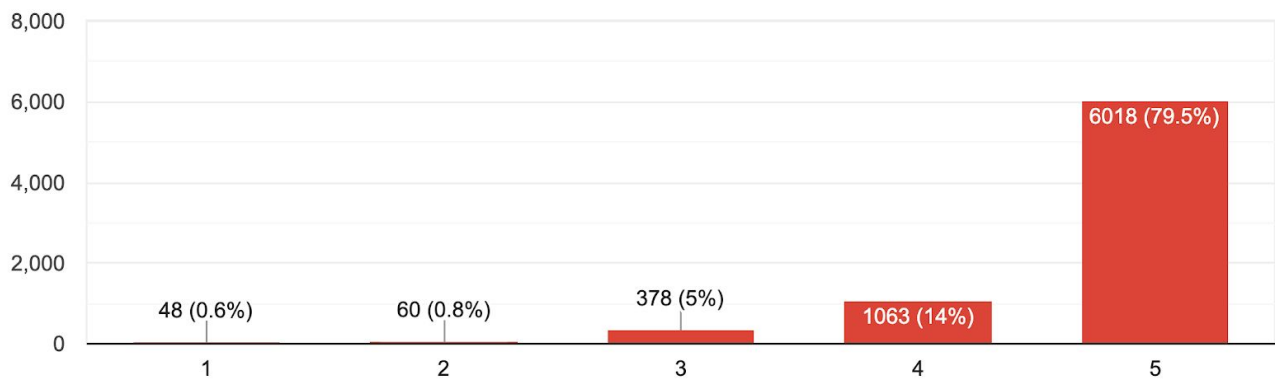
The scale for the below charts is as follows:

1=not an influential factor at all | 5=top factor in influencing responses

i. An overwhelming 93.5% ranked the science of the virus as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

The science of the virus.

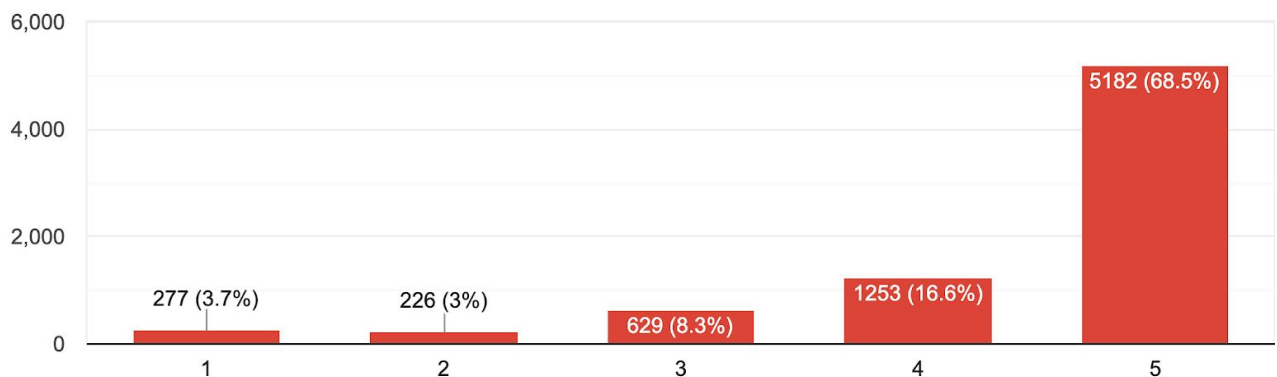
7,567 responses



ii. 85% ranked funding concerns as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

Funding concerns (i.e., proper funding for PPE, federal funding to reduce class size)

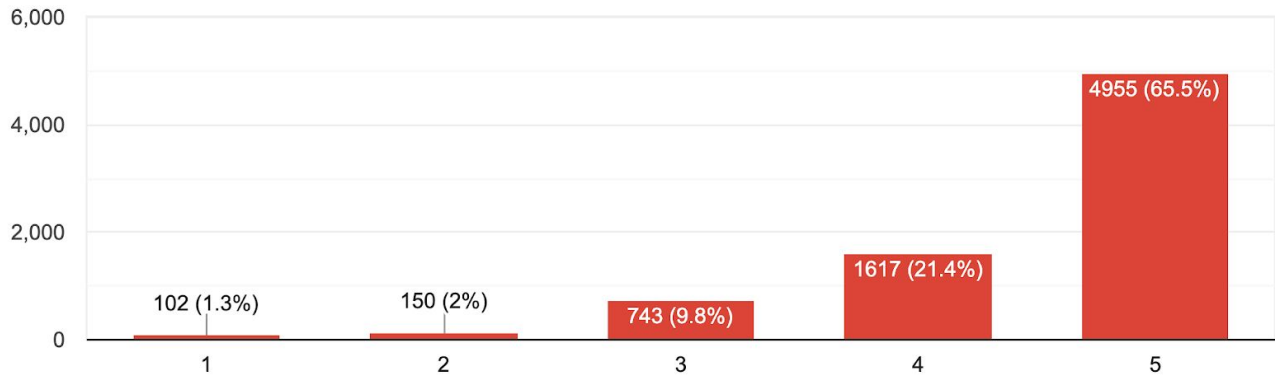
7,567 responses



iii. 87% ranked funding concerns with the District's plan as written as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

Concerns with the District's plan as currently written.

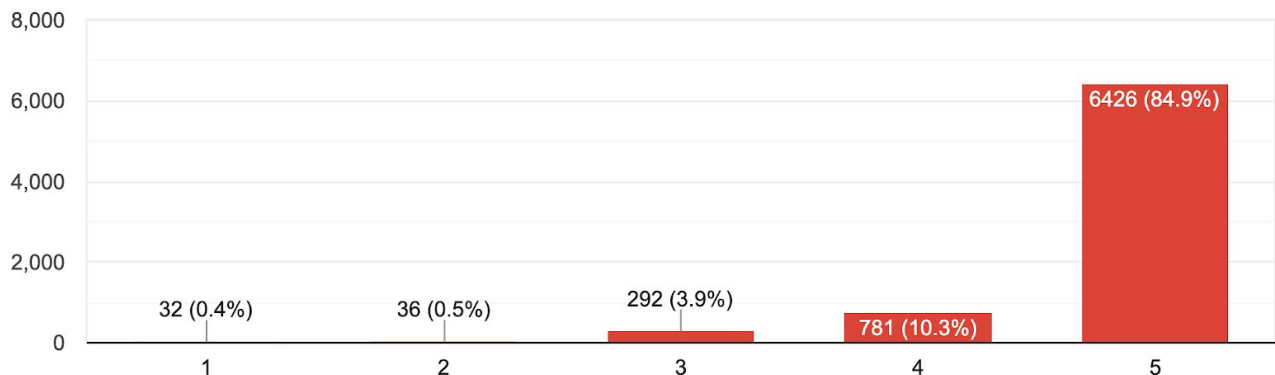
7,567 responses



iv. An overwhelming 95% ranked the health of their students as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

Concerns for the health of my students.

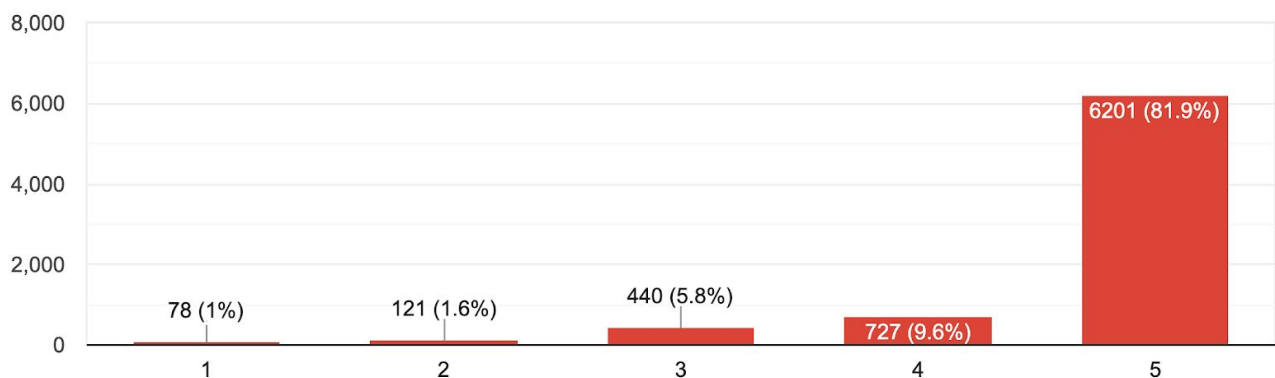
7,567 responses



v. 92% ranked their own health as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

Concerns for my personal health.

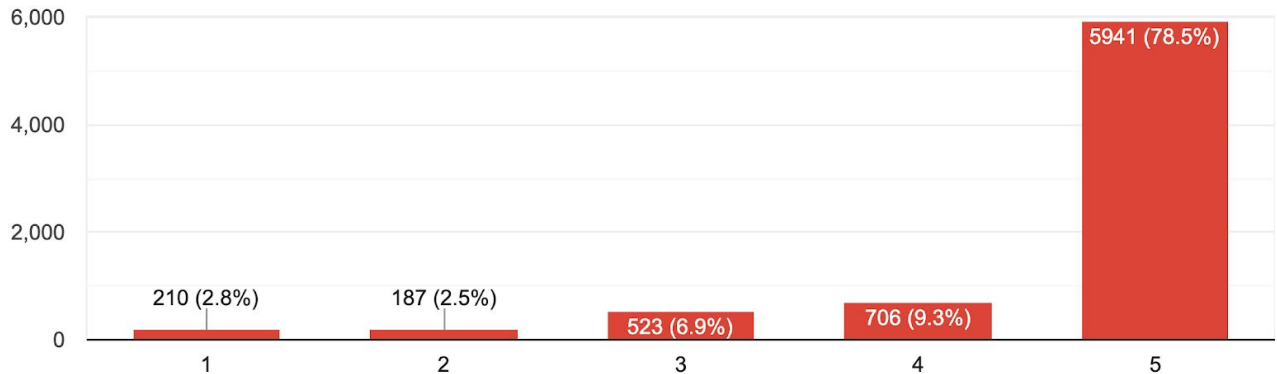
7,567 responses



v. 88% ranked the health of a loved one as a top or nearly top factor in their responses.

Concerns for the health of a loved one.

7,567 responses



Section 2d: Open Feedback

Members were provided space to share optional open feedback. A sampling of their responses follows:

- I am in favor of the 100% fully remote teaching model. I think it's important that we look at moving forward through the lens of the current global pandemic.
- Much like opening the economy up too quickly, I think all stakeholders of SDP will unfortunately learn a lesson after it's too late.
- Why is our district wasting valuable time, money, and resources on a dangerous plan that clearly won't work? Why not use the resources we have now and make sure EVERY child has access to strong internet, working computers, books, journals, art supplies, musical instruments, science kits, gym equipment, and beneficial educational programming?
- Terrified to bring this home to my children. The plan has NO consideration for those of us caring for the vulnerable.
- I no longer trust the district to work in good faith to overcome the immense obstacles to social distance even in a hybrid model. I am additionally worried by new research that suggests my high schoolers are just as at risk as I am in our poorly ventilated buildings.
- As a coach, I visit at least two schools daily & work at 440. A cure for COVID-19 has not been identified and the cases continue to grow.

- I don't think we are able to guarantee the safety of ourselves, our students, and their/our families. I understand that not opening will present major difficulties for many. I think we should go virtual for the first semester and encourage state and federal govt to prioritize supporting families in dire financial need instead of buying plexiglass screens and hand sanitizer.
- If we are not given proper medical training, safe buildings, and PPE, teachers and students will surely get sick, looking at the data, it will happen. I should not have to choose between serving my students or my family and my health. As teachers we already make a lot of sacrifices, please don't ask us to make our health one of them. I am scared.
- I believe it will be impossible for many schools to meet basic necessities such as square-foot-per occupant guidelines and guidelines about air circulation. I believe opening schools for a hybrid model district wide will be a situation rife with inequality.
- Virus cases are beginning to rise in Philadelphia. Teachers and students cannot effectively social distance, buildings are not properly ventilated, proper PPE for students/teachers, and concerns with sanitizing stations and hand-washing stations.
- "No more than 25 people in a room when FEASIBLE". That word was deliberate. It removes any responsibility to actually social distance in any classroom, which tells me I could be forced to be in a room with 24 other people, something I have not done since March 13, not even with my family and friends who I know have taken every precaution.
- There is no way to properly distance, provide proper air circulation and teach while feeling immense pressure and stress over our heads worrying about contracting the virus and/or spreading it to at-risk loved ones.
- Our school only has two classrooms with windows that can open. Our school is not prepared for this type of emergency. I do not trust the district to enforce the guidelines that they put out to the media. Look at how they handle asbestos and lead.
- How can I social distance while working with students who require hand over hand support?
- How will I socially distance 18 people (8 students, each has a TSS or 1:1, myself, and our assistant) in a smaller size classroom?
- Why did SDP say 12-15 students but the document says 25?
- A huge concern is the ability of the district to properly clean and disinfect the school buildings daily because the best practices of cleaning have always been an issue (34 years and two school buildings later). I want to be back in the classroom with my new kindergartners but there is so much of the unknown and risk factors for students, their families, my health and my family's well-being.

- I teach Low Incidence MDS 18-21 year olds. The plan calls for 4 days a week face to face. My students cannot keep on masks, must be fed, 2 people must lift them out of their wheelchairs and onto the changing table to change their diapers. Many of the students require private duty nurses, and that's more people.
- As a Health and Physical Education teacher, I would definitely prefer teaching in person. However, the risk is not worth it. It's like taking care of an injury. If you refuse to rest it and treat it properly, the injury will linger. It's the same with the virus. We should take every precaution to the fullest and maybe next winter or spring we can return to school with no restrictions.
- As a high school teacher, I am particularly concerned with being in contact with 180 students every two days. Also, it seems to me that we cannot safely engage in any of the socializing and personalization that would come with in-person instruction, so shouldn't we be spending this time creating a rigorous and robust online pedagogy and curriculum?!
- As a kindergarten teacher I find it impossible to maintain social distancing, continuously sanitize, and monitor masks to keep everyone healthy while trying to follow best teaching practices, engage students, and build relationships amongst students.
- As a specialist teacher, I am very concerned about the possibility of being a super spreader within my school's community. I do not think the SDP's plan adequately addresses this issue.
- I am very concerned as a SPED Assistant. In most special education classrooms many of our students have several adults to help support their needs. I just feel that this plan is dangerous especially for SPED.
- As numbers are getting worse, the unknown with students spreading the virus is also unknown. The SDP is asking teachers and all other staff to take a chance to put their lives, staff family lives, student lives, student family lives, and extended families on the line. What will happen when teachers start getting sick and cannot come to work? The risk is too great to have PEOPLE in the buildings.
- As the school nurse I am concerned with exposure, cleanliness, & the amount of students in my building as well as construction. I do not have an additional space that can be used for isolation.
- Asymptomatic spread, aerosol transmission, and transmission by children mean that reopening schools could lead to outbreaks across our city. It is impossible for us to consider anything less than a 100% virtual learning environment for the start of the school year. We need to stop wasting time on a reopening plan that is destined to lead to sickness, chaos, closures, and deaths.
- At this time, reopening schools with a hybrid model does not seem feasible based on current data and the trajectory of the virus.

- My fiancé and I are both teachers in the school district and have a young child age 4. I honestly feel that the lack of scientific measures brought forth by the School District are putting him and myself at a risk of leaving our child parentless.
- Building ventilation is a major problem that is expensive to remedy. Virus is spread through the air and the lack of healthy ventilation in most buildings can be deadly. We have some rooms with no windows and an antiquated HVAC system.
- I am concerned with how vague the district plan is. How are they making this happen?
- I am concerned with the spread of the virus, the illness, and death of my students, colleagues, family, and self.
- My students WILL NOT BE SAFE in a school that lacks proper ventilation and cooling. In a classroom that has tables, I am not confident that I can adequately socially distance students. This isn't feasible.
- I am just nervous, plain and simple.
- I do not believe that the District's plan as it is written will be sufficient to protect staff and students in schools. I do not have confidence that even the (insufficient) measures in the plan will be carried out with fidelity. I do not have confidence that buildings will be cleaned frequently enough or thoroughly enough. I also believe more PPE should be provided.
- Concern: Poor air quality in a near 100 year old building. This was a concern before COVID-19 but now it is a major concern.
- Concerns: Poor ventilation, instructing kindergartens 7 hours a day with masks (they will not keep them on), living with a high risk wife and child, my pregnant wife (PE teacher) having to go back into a building, lack of concern from the district for our health.
- Pre-K students will have a hard time using social distance.
- Recently gave birth to a premature son and I fear for his safety with the unknowns of this virus.
- I think quarter 1 should be fully virtual with a REAL plan developed in the event it is safe to return by Q2.
- The science and statistics should govern opening. Exposure of everyone involved should be considered.
- Where's the data and science that backs reopening?
- Safety first, and it's not in the plans presented.
- No one should have to die by reopening schools.

Section III: Conclusions

The PFT believes that a full return to virtual learning for the first quarter, at minimum, is warranted. This is not a position we take lightly. Our members want to be in buildings doing the jobs they love—and they want to do so when it is safe to do so. Our children learn best in face to face environments, but we cannot compromise the physical safety of the students and staff in order to do so.

Any exceptions to a fully virtual reopening must be considered on a situational and scientific basis. For example, if there is a desire to bring any group of children or staff into buildings, an in-depth and proactive safety plan is crucial and must include the practitioners of any given program. These exceptions should be extremely limited, if at all.

Our members are concerned for their own safety, and they are deeply concerned for the safety of the children they serve. None of us wish to be in this terrible situation, but we can and must do everything within our collective power to safeguard the safety of every child and educator that we serve.

Given the three factors outlined at the beginning of our report: the uptick in COVID-19 cases, the deeply flawed District reopening plan, and lack of federal funding, our only way to safeguard our students and educators at this current juncture is by implementing a fully virtual start to the school year.