



PHILADELPHIA *FEDERATION of TEACHERS*

Via Electronic Transmission

November 4, 2020

Dear Dr. Hite:

With alarming rises in COVID cases in Philadelphia and across the Commonwealth, including in suburban counties where many of our members live, it is incumbent upon the District to delay the return of PreK-2 staff. Requiring the return of thousands of educators amidst a shocking uptick in cases would be a callous disregard for the health and safety of not only our educators but also of the community at large.

Philadelphia's case count over the past two weeks falls under the [substantial category as outlined by the PA Departments of Education and Health](#) and included in our MOU. Case counts in Delaware County, too, are in the substantial category for the past week. Cases in other collar counties remain in the moderate category and are on the rise.

In the past week, Philadelphia's cases have risen substantially, and the positivity rate is indicative of "[high rate of community transmission](#)." The ever-important [reproductive transmission](#) (Rt- effective reproduction) is now well over 1, meaning that the virus is growing very quickly. To bring thousands of educators back right now is a foolish plan that jeopardizes not only the educators' health but further jeopardizes any chance of an in-person return to school for our children. Bringing educators back now, amidst not only a [massive uptick in cases](#), but also very little proven data around the District's ability to safeguard the health of its employees, you will be jeopardizing lives. It's that simple.

We have seen no evidence, on our tours or otherwise, that the safety standards outlined in the MOU have been met, including those that must be met before the return of teachers. Further, the ventilation reports in hundreds of locations indicate an occupancy of zero, which as Reginald McNeil stated very clearly during a number of our walkthroughs, means that the spaces are unfit for even one occupant.

Consider [the cautionary and devastating tale](#) from Arizona, where teachers were infected and one lost their life, while working in a school building without students. Every single precaution was taken, but it was not safe. Further, in at least three School District of Philadelphia buildings, we know of cases spread by very few adults volunteering or assigned to be in buildings for supply distribution. This plan is reckless.

Our schools educate primarily Black and Brown students experiencing poverty, and we know that COVID has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown communities. As a union and a city, we need to do everything in our collective power to ensure that we are staying as safe as possible to flatten the curve of this deadly virus. To do that, the return of any adults to buildings must be delayed. It's inexcusable to do otherwise.

Further, we know that many of our students have struggled profoundly during online learning, and we must do everything we can to create a safe return to in-person learning. Bringing thousands of teachers into school buildings that are not proven to be safe, amidst the highest levels of COVID rates yet, is dangerous and will almost certainly prevent any substantive return to in-person learning.

This plan is astonishing in its disregard for the science of COVID, for the agreements outlined in our MOU, and for basic recognition of the profound fear that our 13,000 members are experiencing over the District's planning and implementation thus far.

I look forward to this being immediately addressed and for you to recognize what is at stake in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry T. Jordan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jerry" being the most prominent.

Jerry T. Jordan

Cc: Governor Tom Wolf

Mayor James F. Kenney

Dr. Tom Farley, Health Commissioner, City of Philadelphia

Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of Health, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Mr. Noe Ortega, Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania