



PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION of TEACHERS

Via Electronic Transmission

November 6, 2020

Dear Dr. Hite:

Thank you for your reply to my November 4th correspondence. I would like to address several points.

You inquired about our specific concerns regarding facilities, but I want to once again reiterate that the virus trajectory itself makes it entirely unsafe for educators to return in any capacity. On the educator town hall yesterday, our members were once again informed that there is very little risk of transmission within schools. This is simply untrue, and in fact enraged many of our members, rightfully so. I again point you to the report from Arizona of the rampant spread of COVID through a building with only educators present. Their [superintendent wrote](#), "Mrs. Byrd did everything right. She followed all the protocols. If there's such a thing as a safe, controlled environment inside a classroom during a pandemic, that was it. We had three teachers sharing a room so they could teach a virtual summer school. They were so careful."

The virus count in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania is skyrocketing. This must drive decision making. While staffing and planning issues are certainly critical, first and foremost, the trajectory of the virus must rule the day. We are in absolutely no condition to return in any capacity in the near future. Just today, there were an astonishing 3,384 cases in the Commonwealth, the highest yet by far. [Dr. Birx has warned the nation](#) that we are entering the "most concerning and most deadly phase of this pandemic."

In Philadelphia, we have now received notification of cases in at least six (6) schools--without students present. COVID can, and will, spread in buildings even with small numbers of staff present.

Community spread is rampant, and on a quick uptick. Over the past seven (7) days, the PCR percent positivity is 9.1%. This is dangerous.

In response to your request for specifics regarding our areas of concern within school facilities:

Data

- We have received none of the data that we have asked for in order to assess facility safety. While we sent this request again on 11/2, we have made these requests in

multiple methods over the course of multiple meetings and emails, for months. These requests, detailed in our 11/2 request, include the following topics:

- A. Ventilation
- B. Windows
- C. Physical Distancing/Space Size Details For All Occupied Spaces
- During our meeting this week, we were assured that we would have this data by Wednesday 11/4. We do not.
- Further, anecdotal evidence points to buildings being absolutely unprepared in any capacity.
- Additionally, we did not see any evidence during our tours that buildings were prepared.
- Thus, we have zero evidence that any facility is safe for occupancy.

Air Balancing and Ventilation

- The data is entirely incomplete, and the data we have seen is deeply concerning.
- It is equally discouraging to learn that once again, people who are not experts in ventilation have been downplaying its significance in spreading COVID. This is absurd and dangerous. I was upset to hear that a CHOP doctor informed our membership that ventilation reports (and safe ventilation) are “nice to have,” and masks are better than good ventilation. This is unacceptable.
- Further, I reiterate again the absolute incomplete results from air balancing reports and the fact that hundreds of locations that have been tested were scored as “zero.” Additionally, we have seen no evidence that the fans installed, or in the process of being installed, will be anywhere near sufficient. We have seen some window fans installed in windows with screens. The screen is removed, the fan installed and plugged into a wall outlet, and then a tight-fitting plywood sheet is placed in the opening around the fan and then secured in place. There are several issues with this condition that still require independent evaluation and verification of adequacy.
- Again, I reiterate Mr. McNeil’s comments during our walkthrough that “zero means zero.”
- Without complete reports from each school, that school must be considered unsafe for occupancy.

School Based Examples

There are a number of schools where we have seen significant concerns.

At Ethan Allen, as of 11/4/2020:

- No air balancing report
- FAC reported that square footage would be used to determine occupancy
- Occupancy signs posted without numbers
- Overall building conditions are unacceptable
- Auditorium, which is the only location where students can be admitted, is in disarray and environmentally hazardous

At JB Kelly, as of 11/4/2020:

- Ongoing construction affects are not limited to area of constructions
- Classrooms are filthy
- Tiles were not replaced after asbestos removal

At FS Edmonds and Fitler, this week:

- Numbers for room occupancy on air balancing reports are not reflected on the occupancy postings on each room.
- Building engineers at these two schools (likely more) were provided with 'new' occupancy numbers that are higher than permitted according to air balancing.

At Richmond, this week:

- School staff was informed that there will be no ventilation report because they know the fan system in the school is non-operational.

These are just a few examples, and we have anecdotal reports that these issues are pervasive throughout the system. Considering bringing educators back into these environments will spread the virus, and that is unconscionable. Not only will it jeopardize their health, it will lead to further community spread amidst a massive surge.

Reopening must be delayed well beyond a week, and must be done so until such time as there is a significant, sustained decrease in cases and trajectory.

Sincerely,



Jerry T. Jordan
President

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