

Keith Pretlow

**Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Building Representative
Culinary Arts Instructor, Ben Franklin High School, Philadelphia**

**PA Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
Safe Reopening of Schools**

August 3, 2020

Good Afternoon. My name is Keith Pretlow, and I am a Culinary Arts Instructor at Philadelphia's Ben Franklin High School. I am also the proud Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Building Representative at my school, where I have taught for 3 years. I want to thank Senator Boscola and all of the Senators who are here today. We've heard important testimony so far today, and I thank you for providing the opportunity for teachers to share our insights.

Reopening is a *very* challenging topic, and I just want to say very clearly: I want to be back in my school building, and so does every educator that I've talked to. Remote learning is extremely hard, and as a CTE teacher of culinary arts, it's uniquely challenging. In my classroom--which is often my school's Franklin Stove Restaurant or the Kite and Key Cafe--learning is hands on. On any given day, I may be teaching my students proper knife cuts, preparing them for their ServeSafe certification, teaching them about menu design, perfecting new recipes, food science, Hospitality and Travel Law, Business and Accounting 101 as well as a host of other topics.

Believe me, doing this from afar is not easy. And what's worse is that we had just been able to re-enter our building after a problematic renovation project that subjected my students, colleagues, and I to damaged asbestos for months on end. So to say my school community knows a lot about upheaval and environmental hazards is an understatement.

So while the COVID-19 pandemic is very different from the asbestos crisis facing my school and dozens of others across Philadelphia, the threat of the unknown and the fear for our own health certainly has parallels. Throughout the whole time we were prohibited from entering our building, uncertainty and fear was definitely front and center. And I feel the same way now, but it seems even more grave because of just how quickly this virus can spread and just how much we still don't know about it. I wonder if those who minimize the risk associated with reopening schools truly understand the day to day

school operation. There are many subjects that require close proximity if students are going to get the most of them. For decades teachers have been instructed on how to create a cooperative learning environment and now we are being instructed to put desks in rows with students seated six feet apart in rooms that do not allow for that.

The fact that so many students live in shelters, multi family homes and take public transportation to and from school increases the probability that they would come in contact with someone who is infected and that puts teachers and students at risk.

In Philadelphia, we haven't met the thresholds yet for reopening. These are thresholds driven by science, and making sure we are adhering to them will save lives. And we also need to have a clear and sufficient plan that includes input from all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, students and the district.

Right now, I'm working hard to plan for my fall of remote learning with students. Throughout the spring, I came up with creative ways to meet my students' needs during the shutdown. I filmed myself in my own kitchen preparing meals and working on skills. Students then recreated meals and sent videos or photos of their finished products. We even did some Tik-Tok collaborations, so hopefully we can do that again as long as the website is still operational in a few weeks.

But even with my best efforts, it was not always enough, and this is what I think my District, and the city, state and federal officials who fund them, need to do this fall:

- Ensure that every student has free and reliable internet access as well as a computer.
- Let educators identify supplies or other resources that students may need at home in order to complete tasks at hand. Invite us to participate in this process. We are the experts.
- Provide students, parents, and staff with frequent updates on not only remote learning, but also on updates around reopening buildings.

These are just a few of the ways that we will be able to improve the remote learning experience for our students this fall.

I wish we were not in the situation we are now in. I wish I could be in my school kitchen teaching my students how to butcher a chicken or prep my students for the Careers through Culinary Art Program competition, but it's just not safe right now. The health of

my students, the health of my colleagues, and my health is on the line, and so we'll do what we need to do to make the best of another period of remote learning.

Thank you Senator Boscola and the entire committee for this opportunity.