



TEAMSTERS LOCAL 502 CASA

January 3, 2022

Happy New Year Dr. Hite,

I am writing on behalf of the members of Teamsters Local 502: CASA which represents the Philadelphia School Administrators.

We are urging you to **pause the start of the January 2022** school year in-person learning in **all** of our schools, at least until local COVID data shows a sustained downward trend.

It is clear from the upward COVID trends flowing from the Thanksgiving school holiday, that we can expect the same if not greater illness from this winter school break. We sound the alarm that in-person learning will increase the surge of cases which can include hospitalizations and at worst, death. Further, the high transmissibility of Omicron will contribute to the increasing trend in staff and student infections.

CASA has several concerns regarding the return to school with COVID-19 cases rapidly increasing. In a survey to our membership, we found the following data (thus far) based on 107 school principals and several other administrators:

- 665 Teachers/Instructional Staff absent for the week of January 3, 2022
- 205 Climate Staff absent for the week of January 3, 2022
- 59.2% of those surveyed do not have enough PPE
- 8% (14 schools) have nurse vacancies

This sample size constitutes approximately one-third of the District Principals and schools. If you were to assume the same pattern for all remaining two-thirds of the schools you could estimate there would be somewhere between 1,500 to 1,995 teachers absent. This estimation is not counting climate safety staff, maintenance, or food service.

While we understand from your letter that the Health Department stated students can return to schools, there are several mitigating circumstances that make a safe return to in-person learning highly unlikely for our urban at-risk school populations, as follows:

1. The numbers of COVID-19 cases are not accurately reported on a daily real-time basis. The twenty-four to forty-eight hour turnaround time in which data is shared with union stakeholders causes a lag in responsiveness. When stakeholders attempt to share the correct numbers for a point of accuracy for immediate action, a standard form response is received.
2. Because instructional personnel are worried about their health and the lack of a comprehensive proactive response by the district as it relates to deep cleansing, lack of proper PPE (such as N95 or KN 95 masks for students, faculty, staff, and administrators), and vacancies, instructional personnel are electing to stay home which puts our schools safe and secure operations at immediate risk.
3. The cleanliness of our schools is not at the proper level due to the number of cleaning staff vacancies compounded by the number of cleaning staff that are on COVID-19 leave.

In order for everyone to return to in-person instruction, Teamsters Local 502: CASA believes the following needs to occur:

1. An immediate return to virtual instruction for ALL DISTRICT SCHOOLS, STAFF AND STUDENTS, ALIKE.
2. We will need N95 or KN95 masks for students and staff. The medical field reports that cloth and surgical masks are not effective in protecting us from Omicron, given the 64% increase in pediatric hospitalizations.
3. Lunch is a hotspot for transmission. We will need to visit ways to make that a safe area. Since Mayor Kenney has mandated that all restaurant patrons must show proof of vaccinations, why isn't the School District following the same direction?
4. Families will need places to be tested. There appears to be a delay at the district sites. The next available appointment for the community testing sites is January 5, 2022, after we return to school. Also, individuals should be allowed to receive Rapid Response Testing not Delayed Testing.
5. The Covid response team needs to improve their turnaround time. We receive Covid letters 24 hours or more (in some instances up to 5 days) after cases are reported. This puts children at risk because the communication is delayed to families.
6. Schools will need to receive additional rapid tests to test symptomatic students.
7. We will need the 440 non-represented staff to continue to be deployed to buildings that are understaffed. Currently, unionized members are illegally taken out of their job classifications to be deployed into schools while non-represented employees continue to work remotely and/or in a quiet environment at 440 district headquarters. Further, mainly 440 non-represented employees are working remotely while unionized employees are being forced to congregate together. So, if non-represented employees can do their jobs from the comfort and safety of their homes, why is this same comfort and safety of unionized employees not being considered? Why was this arbitrary and capricious decision made and where is the equity in this decision?
8. Return back to the deep-cleaning protocol from May 2021, including daily antiviral fogging mist application after students and staff have left the building.

As school leaders, we greatly value the benefit of in-person learning. However, our first charge has always been and must continue to be the safety of our students and members of our school communities. The data are clear. A return to in-person learning at this time, absent of the necessary steps to mitigate massive outbreaks in schools, is irresponsible and should be delayed.

I therefore, urge you to pause the return of in-person learning of all Philadelphia schools until our requests stated above can be met and honored. To separate schools unnecessarily causes confusion and perpetuates inequities.

Sincerely,

Robin P. Cooper

Robin P. Cooper, Ed.D

President of Teamsters Local 502: CASA

cc:

Mayor's Office

City Council Members

State Senators of Philadelphia

State Representatives of Philadelphia

School Board Members of School District of Philadelphia

Jerry Jordan, President of Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

Ernie Bennett, President of 32BJ SEIU

Royce Merriweather, President of School Safety/Police

Nicole Hunt, President of Local 634

William Hamilton, President of Teamsters Joint Council #53

Shakeda Gaines, President of Philadelphia Home and School Council

Dana Carter, President of Parents Organized for a Better School District of Philadelphia

Rev. Robert Collier, President of Black Clergy of Philadelphia

Donna Cooper, Executive Director of PCCY