State of Delaware Announces Guidance for Reopening of Schools for 2020-21 Academic Year

Guidance to help Districts and Charters plan for three different learning scenarios based on COVID-19 spread

WILMINGTON, Del. – Secretary of Education Susan Bunting today released the state's guidance for the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 academic year. Districts and charter schools will use this guidance to formulate plans for the upcoming school year.

In August, Governor John Carney, in consultation with the Delaware Division of Public Health, will announce his decision on whether or not schools will start the year in person. Districts and charters will then implement their plans based on the scenario that aligns with current health conditions, understanding there may be some regional variability.

Click here to read the full guidance.

> *"Since the day we closed school buildings, our goal has been to return students and educators to their classrooms as soon as it is safe to do so," said **Governor Carney**. "When we do return to our school buildings, we know our daily routines will look different than they did in March. Important safety measures, such as wearing face coverings and socially distancing, will help protect our children and educators and help us reduce the spread of COVID-19 so we can stay in our classrooms, where our students learn best."*

Developed in collaboration with the three school reopening workgroups and DPH, today's document outlines what schools need to do prior to re-opening and after instruction resumes under three scenarios: if minimal community spread exists in Delaware (and school buildings re-open), if minimal-to-moderate community spread exists in Delaware (situation dependent) and if significant community spread exists in Delaware (and school buildings remain closed).

While today's guidance applies to districts and charter schools, private schools are encouraged to follow it as well. Minimum requirements for social distancing, mask-wearing, hand-washing and other basic precautions will apply to all schools.

The State of Delaware will also work with districts and schools to make testing available and convenient for all educators and staff before the school year begins.

"This guidance document is meant to be used as support for district and charter leaders as they continue planning for the opening of the 2020-2021 school year," said **Secretary Bunting**. "Essential safety protocols must be implemented by all Delaware schools, preK-12. Additionally, actionable planning steps have been included for districts and charter schools to consider as they develop their own site-based plans."

"It is so important to get children back into a physical school setting, but we are obligated to do it in a way that keeps students and staff safe, by using key prevention strategies for mitigating the potential spread of COVID-19," said **DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay**. "We appreciate the opportunity to work closely with the Department of Education and school reopening workgroups to support them in determining how best to implement the use of face coverings for staff and

students, implement social distancing in classrooms, hallways and lunch periods, and ensure frequent opportunities for good hand hygiene."

Dr. Rattay said DPH has also worked with schools to establish procedures for managing COVID-19 positive cases that occur among students or staff in the school setting, and in reviewing strategies that can be revised and adapted depending on the level of viral transmission in the school and throughout the community.

"Schools provide more than just academics to children and adolescents. In addition, children learn social and emotional skills, get exercise and healthy meals, and access to mental health support, the internet, and other vital services. We want to support schools in re-engaging children in a safe and healthy way," said **Dr. Rattay**.

In May, three school reopening working groups began meeting to advise the department, Delaware school districts and charter schools on ways to safely and effectively reopen Delaware school buildings. The three groups each had a specific focus: health and wellness, academics and equity, and operations and services. With diverse representation on each 17-member group, the groups met over five weeks.

The working groups presented their recommendations, and the following guidance was developed taking into consideration the recommendations, public comments, a state survey of more than 20,000 families, students, educators, and school/district leaders, department research, and health recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics and Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH).

"I am grateful to the committee members for their time and dedication. I also appreciate the widespread interest and feedback from the public. The livestream meetings have been viewed more than 7,000 times, and we have received hundreds of comments from Delawareans," said **Dr. Bunting**.

Caesar Rodney School District Superintendent Kevin Fitzgerald, the longest-serving superintendent in the state, is the president of the Delaware Chief School Officers Association.

"I want to thank Secretary Bunting and the members of the three working groups for their time and expertise," said **Fitzgerald**. "These have been challenging times for all of us. So as school districts begin the monumental task of preparing for the re-opening of schools under the three different scenarios, the guidance provided in this document will be essential in helping to develop plans that will not only promote the health and safety of our students and staff but also meet the educational needs of our students."

"The Delaware State Education Association has followed three guiding principles as we moved into remote learning and now contemplate the reopening of our schools – protecting the health and safety of our students, educators, and the communities they serve; keeping students learning; and minimizing the financial impact on our state, districts, and educators," said **Delaware State Education Association President Stephanie Ingram**. "We thank the Governor and Secretary of Education for making sure that DSEA had representatives on each of the three reopening work groups. By doing so, they ensured that our members' voices would be heard during the process."

Anyone with a question about COVID-19, whether related to medical or social service needs, should call Delaware 2-1-1. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can text their ZIP code to 898-211. Hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Health or medically-related COVID-19 questions can also be submitted by email to DPHCall@delaware.gov.

Report a business for COVID-19 non-compliance using this form.

DPH will continue to update the public as more information becomes available. For the latest on Delaware's response to COVID-19, go to de.gov/coronavirus.

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