Governor Carney, Secretary Bunting Announce Working Groups to Plan Safe Return to School Buildings

Working groups will focus on health and wellness, academics and equity, and operations and services

WILMINGTON, Del. – Governor John Carney and Secretary of Education Susan Bunting announced a public strategy on Monday to plan for the safe reopening of Delaware school buildings. Three COVID-19 School Reopening Working Groups will advise the Delaware Department of Education (DOE), Delaware school districts and charter schools on ways to safely and effectively reopen Delaware school buildings.

Last month, Governor Carney closed Delaware public school buildings for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year due to the threat of COVID-19.

The working groups will focus on:

- **Health and Wellness**
  - *Co-chair*: Mike Rodriguez, Associate Secretary, Delaware Department of Education
  - *Co-chair*: Dr. Meghan Walls, Pediatric Psychologist, Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children
- **Academics and Equity**
  - *Co-chair*: Monica Gant, Associate Secretary, Delaware Department of Education
  - *Co-chair*: Ashley Giska, Assistant Superintendent, Laurel School District
- **Operations and Services**
  - *Co-chair:* Chuck Longfellow, Associate Secretary, Delaware Department of Education
  - *Co-chair:* Oliver Gumbs, Director of Business Operations, Cape Henlopen School District

> *"These working groups will provide important recommendations to Secretary Bunting and school and district leaders on how to safely return to school," said **Governor Carney**. "I am pleased with the expertise these members bring to this important effort and look forward to their guidance on the key issues that Delaware's superintendents and charter school leaders must consider before re-opening their buildings."*

Click on working group to view membership

Group 1: Health and Wellness

- Co-Chair Mike Rodriguez: Associate Secretary, Delaware DOE
- Co-Chair Dr. Meghan Walls: Pediatric Psychologist, Nemours
- Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald: Superintendent, Caesar Rodney School District
- Dr. Laretha Odumosu: Executive Director, Charter School of New Castle Middle School
- Dr. Susan Haberstroh: Director of School Support Services, Delaware DOE
- Stacy Greenly: Counselor, Polytech High School

- Dana Carr: Delaware Division of Public Health
- Sue Smith: Nurse, Mispillion Elementary and member of the Professional Standards Board (PSB)
- Dafne Carnright: Former Chair, Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens and Family Services Program Manager, Autism Delaware
- Dr. Marisel Santiago: Director of Pediatrics, La Red Health Center
- Rev. Provey Powell: Mt. Joy United Methodist Church and Delaware State Board of Education Member
- Kristin Dwyer: Delaware State Education Association
- Representative Valerie Longhurst: Delaware House Majority Leader
- Representative Michael Smith: House Education Committee Member
- Senator Laura Sturgeon: Chair, Senate Education Committee
- Senator Anthony Delcollo: Senate Education Committee Member
- Student Representative: Sussex Technical High School

Group 2: Academics and Equity

- Co-Chair Dr. Monica Gant: Associate Secretary, Delaware DOE
- Co-Chair Ashley Giska: Assistant Superintendent, Laurel School District
- Dr. Matt Burrows: Superintendent, Appoquinimink School District
- Laura Schneider: Principal, West Seaford Elementary
- Loretta Greig: Parent, Lake Forest High School and member of the Professional Standards Board (PSB)
- Dr. Lisa Lawson: Executive Director of Special Education and Support Services, Brandywine School District
- Eugene Young: President, Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League
- Dr. Maria Alonso: Board President, Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School
- Rebecca Vitelli: 2020 Delaware Teacher of the Year, Colonial School District
- Stephanie Ingram: President, DSEA
- Allison Castellanos: ESL Professor, Delaware Technical & Community College
- Gwendolyn Haar: English Teacher, Dover High School
- Representative Kim Williams: Vice-Chair, House Education Committee
- Senator Tizzy Lockman: Vice-Chair, Senate Education Committee
- Representative Bryan Shupe: House Education Committee Member
- Senator Brian Pettyjohn: Delaware State Senate, District 19
- Student Representative: Smyrna High School

Group 3: Operations and Services

- Co-Chair Dr. Chuck Longfellow: Associate Secretary, Delaware DOE
- Co-Chair Oliver Gumbs: Director of Business Operations, Cape Henlopen School District
- Dr. Sherry Kijowski: Principal, Caesar Rodney High School
- Heath Chasanov: Superintendent, Woodbridge School District
- David Hearn: Athletic Director/Drivers Ed Teacher, Delmar School District
- Stacey Clark: Director of Instruction and Student Services, First State Military Academy
- Natosha Rivera: Transportation Supervisor, Seaford School District
- Gerald Allen: HR Director, New Castle County Vo-Tech School District and member of the Professional Standards Board (PSB)

- Kristine Bewley: Manager of Information Systems, Red Clay Consolidated School District
- Leolga Wright: School Board Member, Indian River School District
- Mary Nash Wilson: Senior Fiscal and Policy Analyst, Delaware Office of Management and Budget
- Jeff Taschner: Executive Director, DSEA
- Mike Williams: Delaware PTA Secretary/Parent, Christina School District
- Representative Earl Jaques: Chair, House Education Committee
- Senator Dave Sokola: Senate Education Committee Member and Former Chair
- Representative Charles Postles: House Education Committee Member
- Senator Dave Lawson: Delaware State Senate, District 15

"We're asking each working group to help the department develop a framework of essential actions that school district and charter school leaders should take to effectuate a safe return to school," said **Secretary Bunting**. "These working groups also will help us reach out to our communities so that the ideas and concerns of Delawareans ground our work. These meetings will be open to the public, and I encourage participation across our state."

Virtual meetings will be listed on the Public Meeting Calendar. The first meeting is Thursday, May 21 at 2:00 p.m.

"Preparing for the next school year under these extremely difficult times is going to require a multifaceted approach," said **House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst, a member of the Health and Wellness working group**. "It's not enough to plan for the logistics of how the schools will physically operate and how to ensure all students receive the quality education they deserve. We also have to prepare to address the mental health challenges that many of our children will face. This has been a stressful time for everyone, and children are no different. If we want this unique upcoming school year to be successful, we have to address students' mental health and wellness."

"It is imperative that we protect the safety, health, and wellbeing of students and staff when we reopen our schools," said **Stephanie Ingram, President of the Delaware State Education Association**. "Our primary goal is to meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of all students. These state work groups will give educators a voice in the decision-making process while making sure their thoughts and concerns are heard. This is all about safety. We do not want to rush into a decision that puts anyone in harm's way."

"As we work to transition from remote learning back into our school buildings, supporting the health and wellness of our students and staff members is imperative," said **Mike Rodriguez, Associate Secretary of Student Support at the Delaware Department of Education**. "I'm excited to work with these leaders from across our state to recommend what programming, supports and protections are needed."

The working groups, which include student representation and members of the General Assembly, will make final recommendations to DOE in July. The working groups will continue to meet through September 2020, or an alternate time period as set by Secretary Bunting. DOE will provide staffing support to the working groups.

"I'm honored to co-chair this workgroup to support Delaware students as we navigate how to make the safe transition back to school," said **Dr. Meghan Walls, a pediatric psychologist at Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children and co-chair of the Health and Wellness working group**. "Among our many considerations are the impact of social and emotional distancing and the importance of employing science-based practices to help students return safely to a new normal, prepared to learn."

“I am honored to work with such a talented group of stakeholders on what will be one of the most impactful challenges on public education in modern history,” said **Ashley Giska, Assistant Superintendent at Laurel School District and co-chair of the Academics and Equity working group**. “While the logistics of supporting our students academically and with equity as a driving force will be great, the innovation coming from all of our schools in such a short span of time has been truly inspiring. I am certain we can create a robust path forward for all students in Delaware to grow and thrive as learners in this new environment.”

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 at DPHCall@delaware.gov.

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

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