

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pottstown teachers' perspective

The following letter, which has been edited to fit the available space, was submitted to the Pottstown School Board on behalf of the Federation of Pottstown Teachers by its president of 23 years, Beth Yoder.

I am writing on behalf of the teachers to adamantly request the adoption of full virtual distance learning for the fall of the 20-21 school year.

A hybrid schedule as well as full time classroom model is simply not safe and literally could cost the lives of any of our kids or staff. It is not a question of if someone gets sick and potentially dies, it is a question of when.

Please know that this request we make of the Board is one that neither I nor my fellow colleagues made in haste or hysteria but rather one that was made with an enormous amount of thought after engaging in numerous conversations, formal and informal, with our members and members of the PSD community.

I believe it is important to reiterate that our identity as teachers is fundamentally grounded in our interaction with students in a classroom. As teachers, each of us acts as an instructor, counselor, social worker, parent, nurse and even "confidant".

When we chose this career, it was because we knew that we would play a large role in shaping our future citizens. We embrace these responsibilities knowing that, "it takes a village to raise a child". Consequently, we ask that you keep in mind that our request of full virtual teaching and learning is borne from a series of weighty concerns that outweigh the clear benefits of being in a classroom face to face with our children. ...

[There] is little to no data as ... to how the virus would behave in a classroom. It is not a great leap of reason to say that if such a low risk group is asymptotically carrying the virus in a highly interactive environment then the risk factor multiplies....

A fully reopened school will serve as an exchange point in which the very students who are at the least risk may act

as asymptomatic carriers ferrying the virus from their homes to schools and vice versa. While our student population is comprised of young children and adolescents, our teaching staff and our students' families are far more varied. Children live in diverse family structures that may include grandparents, immunocompromised siblings, and parents with underlying chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and heart disease.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

... We know there is some apprehension about adopting full virtual learning, but have faith in our ability as professionals to adapt to this brave new world of instruction as we have done many times before in our careers. In a matter of three days after the shutdown, all of the teachers had enrichment work for every single one of our students.

Imagine what they could do with the time left this summer to completely and fully plan for an exceptional online learning experience that includes synchronous as well as asynchronous interactions.

My members and I want to use the few weeks left to learn and prepare for a comprehensive and robust online learning experience for our children that seeks to emulate the quality of live instruction our community has come to expect.

Lastly, many of our staff are at high risk due to serious underlying health conditions. It is these incalculable risks that have instilled a great deal of anxiety, concern, and fear in our members. For many of our teachers, such a scenario leaves them powerless to protect themselves and their families even when they follow any and all prescribed protocols.

... As you know, our teachers have always and will always go the "extra mile" for our students but asking us to "become martyrs for the cause" is an ask too great for any of my members, including myself, to bear. ...[It] is imperative to make this decision now so that families and teachers can prepare for an exceptional virtual learning experience.



BETH YODER
President
Pottstown
Federation of
Teachers