

February 10, 2021

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Members, Chester County Commission  
313 West Market Street, Suite 6202  
West Chester, PA 19380

Jeanne E. Franklin  
Director  
Chester County Health Department  
601 Westtown Road, Suite 290  
West Chester, PA 19380-0990

Dear Commissioners Moskowitz, Maxwell, and Kichline, and Ms. Franklin:

On behalf of school employees, students, and families in Chester County, I write to strongly urge you to ensure that county school districts maintain 6 feet of social distance in school buildings if and when they open for in-person instruction, a standard set forth in the Chester County Department of Health's COVID-19 public and private school guidance.

As you know, a growing number of county schools are considering bringing more students back into school buildings for full in-person instruction. Educators and support professionals in Chester County want to be back in their classrooms and schools with their students, but we cannot do this safely by waiving current social distancing rules and overcrowding classrooms and hallways.

That is why maintaining 6 feet of social distance in school buildings is so important.

Chester County's current guidelines require 6 feet of social distance in school buildings with one exception. The guidelines state that: ***“if evidence exists that indicates improvements in COVID-19 cases, transmission, deaths, hospitalizations, etc., schools may consult with the Chester County Health Department about transitioning to in-person with less than 6 feet of physical distance (3 feet as a minimum).”***

At this point, Chester County schools should simply not be allowed to utilize this 3 feet social distancing standard.

Six feet of social distance is now the norm in restaurants, shops, public transportation, and other public spaces across the nation. To allow anything less in school buildings will put students, teachers, support professionals, and their families at unnecessary risk of

contracting COVID-19 and increase the likelihood that they will spread the virus to others.

Just as important, public officials should not allow arguments about the impracticality of enforcing this standard in schools to justify diluting it. As we all know from health experts, the coronavirus doesn't recognize borders, and it won't give us a pass just because keeping space between one another to slow its spread is too hard to do.

Finally, the extraordinary increase in positive COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations over the past several months shows that exercising vigilance is now more important than ever. Loosening health and safety standards now is not in the best interest of the school employees, students, and families that we all want to protect.

The members I represent in Chester County want to teach and serve their students. Their commitment to the county's children is nothing short of extraordinary. But, where schools are holding in-person instruction, our members want to be certain that the mitigation protocols in place will keep them safe and healthy.

To have confidence that schools are reducing health risks in every way possible, it is essential that the 6 feet social distancing requirements be enforced, and I urge you to continue to do so.

As always, I stand ready to work with you to ensure that every school is a safe place to work and learn.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich Askey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "A".

Rich Askey