

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA

MAIN BUILDING
ROOM 140

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2020
10 A.M.

PUBLIC HEARING ON POSSIBLE LEGISLATION NEEDED FOR
PENNSYLVANIA TO SAFELY REOPEN SCHOOLS DUE TO COVID-19

BEFORE:

HONORABLE CURT SONNEY, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE VALERIE GAYDOS
HONORABLE MARK M. GILLEN
HONORABLE BARBARA GLEIM
HONORABLE DAVID HICKERNELL
HONORABLE MIKE JONES
HONORABLE JOSHUA KAIL
HONORABLE JERRY KNOWLES
HONORABLE JASON ORTITAY
HONORABLE MEGHAN SCHROEDER
HONORABLE CRAIG STAATS
HONORABLE MIKE TOBASH
HONORABLE JESSE TOPPER
HONORABLE JAMES ROEBUCK, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE CAROL HILL-EVANS
HONORABLE MARY ISAACSON
HONORABLE PATTY KIM
HONORABLE MAUREEN MADDEN
HONORABLE STEPHEN McCARTER
HONORABLE DAN MILLER
HONORABLE GERALD MULLERY

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COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:
ALAINA KOLTASH
CHRISTINE SEITZ
DANIEL GLATFELTER
CHRISTINE CRONE

CHRISTOPHER WAKELEY
MARLENA MILLER

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Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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(See submitted written testimony and handouts online.)

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Summer A. Miller, Court Reporter
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P R O C E E D I N G S

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MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Good morning.
Welcome to House Education Committee's public hearing.

I'd like to call this meeting to order.

I'm Curt Sonney, the Majority Chairman of the House Education Committee. I'm joined today by Representative Patty Kim, who is the Acting Minority Chair for this hearing. I'd like to remind everyone that this meeting is being recorded and members and guests should please silence all cell phones and electronic devices.

In addition to the committee members here in person, we are joined by other members on our virtual platform. I'm going to ask the members that are present here to introduce themselves and then I will introduce those on the virtual platform.

So beginning on my right, if the members would like to introduce themselves.

REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON: Representative Mary Isaacson, Philadelphia County, 175th district.

REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: Good morning, everyone. Craig Staats, the 145th district in Bucks County.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Representative Dan Miller, Allegheny County.

REPRESENTATIVE MULLERY: Representative Gerry

1 Mullery, Luzerne County.

2 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Representative Jerry
3 Knowles, Schuylkill, Carbon, and Berks Counties, the 124th
4 district.

5 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Jesse Topper, 78th
6 district, Bedford, Fulton, and Franklin Counties.

7 REPRESENTATIVE ORTITAY: Jason Ortitay, 46th
8 district, Allegheny and Washington Counties.

9 REPRESENTATIVE GILLEN: Mark Gillen, Berks
10 and Lancaster Counties.

11 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: Meghan Schroeder
12 from Bucks County.

13 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Barb Gleim from
14 Cumberland County.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Also joining us
16 virtually today are Chairman Roebuck and Representatives
17 McCarter, Jones, Hickernell, and Kail.

18 Our public hearing today is once again
19 focused on safely reopening our schools. Today we'll be
20 hearing from representatives of public school organizations,
21 including the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the
22 Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, the
23 Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, and
24 the Pennsylvania State Education Association, to discuss
25 legislative changes that may be needed this fall in light of

1 COVID-19. In addition to our testifiers today, we also have
2 written testimony on this topic from the Pennsylvania
3 Catholic Conference.

4 I would once again like to announce that we
5 are planning to hold a joint public hearing with the Senate
6 Education Committee on August 19th at 1 P.M. to hear from
7 the Department of Education and the Department of Health.

8 I'd like to thank all of our testifiers in
9 advance and ask that you limit your remarks to five minutes
10 so that we will have ample time for questions and
11 discussion.

12 Today's panel consists of John Callahan, the
13 Chief Advocacy Officer of the Pennsylvania School Boards
14 Association; Dr. Shane Hotchkiss, superintendent for
15 Bermudian Springs School District, representing the school
16 administrators; Shawn Sampson, business manager at
17 Titusville Area School District, representing the school
18 district business officials; and Rich Askey, President of
19 Pennsylvania State Education Association.

20 I see our testifiers are ready.

21 And, John Callahan, if you would like to
22 begin, you may proceed.

23 MR. CALLAHAN: Well, good morning, Chairman
24 Sonney and Roebuck and members of the House Education
25 Committee. My name is John Callahan. I'm the Chief

1 Advocacy Officer here at PSBA. Thanks for inviting PSBA to
2 testify today.

3 As school boards, administrators, teachers,
4 and staff have been preparing for the start of the 2020-21
5 school year and the eventful reopening of public school
6 buildings, they're being confronted with a set of
7 unparalleled challenges in terms of educational,
8 operational, as well as health and safety planning.

9 Public school leaders' primary concern is the
10 health, safety of students, staff, and our community. The
11 need to plan appropriately for health and safety issues
12 relating to the pandemic is affecting everything, all of
13 which is being done by educational professionals trying to
14 follow an ever-expanding universe of guidance from both the
15 federal and state levels, which often conveys best practices
16 while acknowledging that such best practices may be
17 unachievable.

18 As we get closer to the opening of schools,
19 it seems like every day there's a change or an update in how
20 we need to handle this pandemic. Everyone involved in
21 protecting our kids is worried, parents, teachers,
22 administrators, and our elected officials. We are afraid we
23 are going to make the wrong decisions and that will affect
24 our children and staff. However, we know that through this
25 crisis one thing is constant, our schools are going to do

1 everything in their power to protect our students and staff.
2 You're seeing this resolution of mission take place across
3 the Commonwealth with schools' opening plans that are
4 varying by community, some as hybrids, some operating under
5 the new normal, and some have moved to completely online
6 learning. Every community is responding to the local needs
7 and data they have, and all are focused on our students,
8 staff, and community.

9 The bottom line is that this pandemic has
10 turned the already complex job of providing public education
11 for all children in the Commonwealth into an impossible
12 scenario requiring complicated planning and preparation with
13 few explicit answers.

14 Today PSBA was charged in this hearing to
15 provide the committee with legislative action that can be
16 taken to assist schools in dealing with the pandemic,
17 providing savings, and there are many ways that the general
18 assembly can continue to support public education, but today
19 I'm going to highlight just a few.

20 Schools are asking for a long-term relief
21 from mandates that consume much of our budgets. This is
22 number one. We know that the combined effects of mandates
23 are costly and time consuming, and public school leaders
24 fully support the inclusion of the temporary mandated waiver
25 program as part of the Emergency Pandemic Legislation passed

1 way back in March. However, the waiver provisions in Act 13
2 were only available for April, May, and June, which is the
3 same time during which school districts had their hands full
4 dealing with educational, operational, and financial impacts
5 of COVID-19. Public school leaders need a permanent
6 solution that will continue into the future years.

7 A second legislative effort is needed, and
8 has already begun, to take place in the House and Senate,
9 broadband connectivity. We encourage the legislature to
10 continue their efforts in supporting legislation that
11 expands connectivity across the entire Commonwealth so that
12 all our students can access broadband for their lessons and
13 education.

14 A third issue that's come up is prior to the
15 pandemic, we know that charter school tuition costs were
16 rated as the biggest source of budget pressure for school
17 districts. We know that this is largely due to the
18 inequitable and flawed charter school funding system which
19 results in tuition cost increases increased at a much faster
20 rate than the charter school enrollments. In essence, we
21 know we are, in many cases, overpaying for these services.
22 We need funding reforms that are predictable, accurate, and
23 reflect the actual costs to educate students in regular and
24 special education programs.

25 A fourth issue, transportation funding issue,

1 has also come up. One additional concern is how we apply
2 proper health and safety measures to student transportation.
3 What this means in terms of scheduling, costs, and state
4 reimbursements. Adhering to federal and state level
5 guidance would result in significant changes to student
6 transportation practices. Not only will all these changes
7 and vehicle cleanings make transportation more expensive,
8 the need to maintain social distancing on buses will mean
9 that school districts will actually lose out on state
10 reimbursement because the transportation reimbursement
11 formula is based on filling as many seats on a bus as
12 possible. PSBA is looking very much forward to working with
13 you to find solutions to this challenge.

14 A fifth issue, despite all the planning and
15 preparation being done by public schools for the start of
16 the school year in accordance with state and federal
17 guidance, there is no guarantee that schools can prevent any
18 and all potential exposure to COVID-19. School leaders need
19 enhanced liability protections in order to shield taxpayers
20 from frivolous or opportunistic lawsuits over perceived or
21 unintentional exposure to COVID-19.

22 I want to be clear that we recognize that
23 this type of liability protection should be carefully
24 balanced. We're not looking to protect willful or criminal
25 misconduct or gross negligence.

1 A sixth issue is that the COVID-19 pandemic
2 has negatively impacted the current plan to implement a new
3 state graduation mandate starting with the class of '22 --
4 2022, that is, due to the necessary termination of the
5 standardized assessments offering in the '19-'20 school
6 year. In order to address this cancellation of testing and
7 missed career planning, we just simply ask that the
8 graduation requirements be postponed by one year.

9 Another issue that comes up, but saves us
10 funds, and is something that takes us into the next century,
11 another helpful solution that our members are asking is to
12 address the archaic law which only allows advertising and
13 public notices requirements be fulfilled by publishing in
14 printed newspapers. A solution would be to provide local
15 governments with flexible menus for options to use in
16 complying with advertising public notice requirements. Such
17 a solution would not only modernize our advertising
18 requirements, but also provide much needed savings to local
19 governments and school districts.

20 These are just a few ideas and solutions that
21 we have known and that are hitting our school districts
22 right now as we head into the new school year. The COVID-19
23 pandemic has changed all our lives and will likely change
24 the way schools operate moving forward for some time to
25 come. And while the outlook for public education seems

1 members include school district superintendents, assistant
2 superintendents, executive directors, and other public
3 school system leaders from across Pennsylvania. I really do
4 appreciate the opportunity to provide comments regarding the
5 reopening of schools this coming fall and how the
6 legislature can assist school districts through policy
7 development.

8 Our time is short. School districts only
9 have three to four weeks left until we open our schools.
10 The summer of 2020 has been extremely challenging as
11 guidance from national, state, and public health experts has
12 been fluid. I'm before you today to make several requests
13 on behalf of PASA and school districts across the
14 Commonwealth. They include more specific guidance related
15 to public health matters, we're requesting again some
16 liability protection, assistance in flexibility related to
17 school staffing, internet connectivity for all Pennsylvania
18 students, clarity and specificity on instructional days and
19 hours, assurances related to student transportation, as well
20 as several other specific guidance relating to the opening
21 of our schools.

22 PASA and school leaders are really
23 appreciative of efforts by the CDC, PDE, Department of
24 Health, and other agencies that provided us guidance as we
25 look to start the new school year. However, most of what

1 has been issued are suggestions without specificity, leaving
2 difficult decisions to school leaders who are not public
3 health experts. We are concerned that school operation
4 decisions regarding public health matters have been placed
5 in the hands of local school superintendents, school board
6 members, who lack the background, education, and knowledge
7 to make definitive decisions on these matters.

8 In addition, you know, we're seeking some
9 limited immunity. School districts are government entities
10 and are provided general government immunity under Section
11 8541 of the Political Subdivision Tort Claims Act. However,
12 there are exceptions under the Torts Claims Act that may
13 allow individuals to sue public school districts in
14 Pennsylvania, if a student has suffered an injury while
15 under its care, for example, getting sick from COVID.

16 Please notice that we are requesting limited
17 liability coverage. School superintendents are not asking
18 that you protect willful or criminal misconduct, gross
19 negligence, reckless misconduct, or flagrant indifference to
20 the safety of individuals.

21 PASA continues to be concerned about the
22 unknowns related to school staffing in the coming year. We
23 encourage the legislature to provide temporary assistance to
24 school districts in the coming year by creating an easier
25 path for individuals to become certified teachers in

1 Pennsylvania. We support Senator Langerholc's Senate Bill
2 1216 that would help expand the potential pool of certified
3 teachers available for the 2020-21 school year by providing
4 some temporary flexibility to certify teachers. We ask the
5 House to move this legislation forward.

6 In addition, we also suggest that
7 Pennsylvania immediately reevaluate its process to accept
8 teaching certifications from those who hold certifications
9 from outside of Pennsylvania.

10 Internet connectivity for all students, this
11 is a must for every student in Pennsylvania. Some remote
12 parts of the state do not have internet access even if they
13 can afford it because it's really not profitable for
14 providers to provide the service in these sparsely populated
15 areas. Furthermore, we've learned that even in densely
16 populated areas, many students lack connectivity because
17 their families simply could not afford the service.

18 Internet connectivity must become a mandatory
19 and basic service for every student in the state of
20 Pennsylvania. Those who are unable to afford the access
21 must be provided the opportunity and availability. And the
22 internet connection and electronic device to use this
23 internet has really replaced the textbook as a necessary
24 resource for the education of every student in the
25 Commonwealth.

1 Next, we're asking for clarity regarding the
2 180 days, 990 hours, or 900 hours of school. Even though
3 cyber charter schools have been providing remote instruction
4 for more than 20 years and many school districts and
5 intermediate units have been providing their own version of
6 full-time online learning for over a decade, school leaders
7 are suddenly being told that we may not have the authority
8 to count these hours towards the 180 days, 990 or 900 hours.
9 Fortunately, the Department of Education did provide an
10 opinion based on Section 520.1 of the School Code clarifying
11 that school boards have this authority to conduct remote
12 learning during an emergency to meet the instructional needs
13 and hours.

14 If the School Code must be changed to allow
15 for this new reality in pre-K through 12, we ask the general
16 assembly to develop legislation that will update the School
17 Code to allow school districts to fully account for
18 instructional hours accumulated through the remote learning.

19 Student transportation is a major concern for
20 school leaders, especially for those who plan to open with
21 in-person instruction. Many districts have to increase the
22 number of runs and/or add buses to our transportation
23 services. PASA urges the general assembly and the Governor
24 to ensure that student transportation expenses in the
25 '20-'21 school year do not create a financial loss for

1 school districts.

2 PASA is also concerned about several other
3 issues regarding the opening of schools that includes social
4 distancing specifications, mandatory mask wearing
5 specifications, student seating requirements on buses,
6 reporting of COVID-19 cases to the Department of Health, the
7 criteria to quarantine individuals or close schools due to a
8 COVID-19 outbreak, the safe operation of school athletics
9 and extracurricular activities and many other issues
10 pertinent to operating a school district during a pandemic.

11 Finally, we ask that all of our policymakers
12 and school stakeholders support our school leaders during
13 this unprecedented time, as the next few weeks unfold in a
14 time of great uncertainty and certainly anxiety.

15 Thank you so much.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

17 Next will be Shawn Sampson, the business
18 manager for Titusville Area School District, and he's
19 representing the school business officials.

20 MR. SAMPSON: Chairmen Sonney, Roebuck, and
21 members of the House Education Committee, thank you for
22 giving me the opportunity to testify on safe school
23 reopening for Pennsylvania. My name is Shawn Sampson and
24 I'm the business manager at Titusville Area School District,
25 located in Crawford, Warren, and Venango Counties.

1 The current pandemic and its underlying
2 economic impact is creating chaos and uncertainty for school
3 operational planning among a myriad of federal, state, and
4 local rules, regulations, and guidance. I'd like to
5 summarize my written testimony in an effort to provide more
6 time for questions and answers. My written testimony can be
7 summarized with the following topics: Potential liability,
8 supply chain difficulties, the lack of internet access,
9 needed flexibility in school operations, and understanding
10 the financial uncertainty ahead.

11 In regards to potential liability in
12 returning to in-person learning, districts are working very
13 hard to keep students and faculty safe, but with so many
14 iterations of different guidance, it's difficult to know the
15 extent of precautions and mitigation strategies that need to
16 be in place to limit the risk of liability and still
17 successfully educate our students. For example, is it
18 appropriate to have 30 students on a bus if everyone wears a
19 mask and only siblings sit together? Or what if it's not
20 feasible to provide six feet of distance? Is five and a
21 half feet acceptable? Many questions like this with no firm
22 answers make the risk of liability very real for school
23 districts.

24 In regards to internet access, Titusville and
25 many other school districts across the state have a

1 significant number of families without internet access. At
2 Titusville, we've expanded the Wi-Fi to our parking lots to
3 assist these families. We would ask that if the status
4 changes to red, that schools still be permitted to bring
5 students in the facilities in a safe, socially distant
6 manner. This would allow students that don't have internet
7 access to have more access, or in some cases, some in-person
8 instruction for those students who absolutely need it.

9 With the continuing uncertainty and evolving
10 nature of the situation, we are asking for increased
11 flexibility. One way to do this would be to extend Act 13
12 through 2020-'21. As you know, Act 13 allowed school
13 districts to apply for a waiver provision of the Public
14 School Code regulations or standards that don't make sense
15 in the new COVID-19 reality. Staffing is a vital area we
16 need flexibility. If and when employees become sick, the
17 staffing will be stretched thin with minimal substitutes
18 available. New certifications also create issues at a time
19 when we need flexibility. For example, a K4 certificate
20 cannot teach fifth grade. Again, more flexibility is needed
21 in this area.

22 Another area that we could use flexibility is
23 with respect to school bus evacuation drills, severe
24 weather, fire, and other drills. As you can imagine,
25 maintaining proper social distance is not possible during

1 these drills. We recognize the importance of these drills;
2 however, it's critical to adhere to our health and safety
3 plans to keep students safe from the spread of COVID-19.

4 In regard to transportation, the current
5 transportation formula works quite well under normal
6 circumstances; however, these are not normal circumstances.
7 We would suggest a temporary funding formula be put in place
8 for the 2020-'21 school year. PASBO is working on options
9 to address this challenge and would be happy to work with
10 this committee on this issue.

11 And finally, in regards to flexibility, food
12 service is an area that I think is being overlooked. And
13 food service could severely -- could be a severe impact to
14 district operational budgets if student participation drops
15 off. So districts need the flexibility to offer meals in
16 nontraditional ways.

17 And finally, understanding the financial
18 uncertainty. In regards to cyber enrollment, without
19 debating the cost or the effectiveness of cyber learning, we
20 still need to recognize the significant, unexpected
21 financial impact this enrollment will have on our already
22 depleted budgets. These additional tuition increases will
23 exasperate an already precarious financial situation for
24 school districts.

25 The IFO analysis, which looks at just

1 property taxes, earned income taxes, and delinquent revenue,
2 projects a loss to tax collections between 450 and 500
3 million for school districts in 2020-'21. Additionally,
4 PASBO expects a potential loss of other local revenue
5 between 260 to 290 million for this fiscal year. As a
6 result, our best case scenario projects a local revenue loss
7 of at least 700 to 800 million statewide. Unfortunately,
8 these and other impacts will not go away instantly. We will
9 need to deal with these issues for years to come and we will
10 have to plan to do so.

11 So in conclusion, despite all of this, we
12 have no choice but to meet this challenge head on. Our
13 students, communities, and taxpayers depend on us meeting
14 this challenge. Successfully meeting these challenges will
15 make public education stronger, more adaptable and more
16 innovative for the future. To get there, we know we have a
17 long and difficult road ahead of us. We look forward to
18 working with this committee and the legislature as we
19 continue to tackle many issues that have arisen and will
20 arise as a result of COVID-19.

21 Thank for your time, and I'm happy to answer
22 any questions you may have.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

24 And our last testifier is Rich Askey,
25 president of the PA State Education Association.

1 You may begin.

2 MR. ASKEY: Good morning, Chairman Sonney,
3 Chairman Roebuck, and members of the House Education
4 Committee. I am Rich Askey, president of the Pennsylvania
5 State Education Association, and I want to thank you for
6 inviting PSEA to share our perspective on what is needed to
7 help educators and students successfully navigate through
8 this time of continued crisis.

9 PSEA members are eager to see their students
10 and their colleagues in person. Their enthusiasm, however,
11 has been severely hampered by their valid and serious
12 concerns about the safety and the well-being of everyone in
13 school, if returning to in-person instruction is done
14 without crucial safeguards in place.

15 You and your colleagues took swift action
16 last spring with the adoption of Act 13 to help provide the
17 education community with much needed clarity. And on behalf
18 of PSEA'S 180,000 members, I want to thank you for this
19 demonstration of commitment and support to public education.
20 We need that commitment and support to continue, perhaps now
21 more than ever before.

22 As communities throughout Pennsylvania
23 prepare to return to school in whatever form, the challenges
24 are many and the answers are few. Reopening will look
25 different in each school entity, that is the reality of a

1 local control state. Local control should not, however,
2 mean the absence of statewide consistency in safety and
3 clear expectations for certain protocols and strategies
4 proven most effective for mitigating transmissions in our
5 schools. A failure to consistently apply mitigation
6 strategies will result in needlessly exposing students,
7 staff, and their families to a deadly virus with no cure.

8 This is why we are grateful for the
9 opportunity you have given us here today to share our
10 specific concerns and solutions for this next round of much
11 needed School Code emergency legislation.

12 So I want to briefly review three of
13 Pennsylvania's recommendations for the next round of
14 emergency School Code legislation, which will also include
15 several recommendations to help our members working in
16 higher education, particularly the community colleges. But
17 I strongly encourage each of you to read my written
18 testimony, which covers all of our recommendations and in
19 more detail.

20 I've chosen to focus on safety because that's
21 our most pressing need today. But someday, we will come out
22 of this crisis, and we need to do so with our education
23 system intact, and that includes K-12 as well as higher
24 education. In my written testimony, I've outlined steps to
25 do that.

1 In short, we need to keep all our school
2 personnel ready and equipped to meet student needs. Our
3 staff is eager to work with yours on crafting legislation to
4 address the concerns we continue to hear from our members,
5 our students, and their families about returning to
6 in-person instruction.

7 First, we recommend that the legislature take
8 action to require face coverings for students and staff with
9 certain exceptions for children with medical needs and
10 special needs children. Despite guidance from the
11 Department of Health and DPE, it has been evident that many
12 school districts are making masks optional for students in
13 the upcoming school year, rather than required. Many of our
14 members are terrified of physically returning to schools and
15 bringing the virus home to their families and loved ones.
16 If that occurs and educators must leave school because they
17 are sick or have to care for sick people, it will have
18 defeated the entire goal we've all been working toward, the
19 reopening of school.

20 Second, our members are also very concerned
21 about the lack of consistent policies across the state on
22 what happens when a student or an employee shows symptoms
23 during the school day. My members need to know there's a
24 standard safety protocol for when this happens in every
25 school entity. Sending them to the school nurse, who may or

1 may not have PPE or might have other students with other
2 health issues present, is not good practice.

3 Our members are concerned that some of the
4 health and safety plans approved thus far do not adequately
5 address how positive cases among staff and/or students will
6 be addressed. Mitigation cannot work if proper quarantine
7 measures are not put into place. Based on the local plans
8 we have seen so far, it's become clear that we need your
9 help to ensure there is more consistent and understandable
10 quarantine instruction and guidance from the state level.

11 Third, we need to ensure that if a student or
12 employee is exposed to COVID, they are required to
13 quarantine immediately. The very last thing we need are
14 school employees, whether in public school or higher
15 education, who are unable to self-isolate at home because
16 they lack either sick time or the financial resources to be
17 off work for two weeks.

18 Correspondingly, we can't have parents
19 sending potentially infected students to school for the same
20 reasons. It's all around good business practice to support
21 all employees in every sector of the state, in this regard,
22 but in particular for the school community where the virus
23 could easily spread.

24 Ensuring paid leave for COVID exposures is
25 the right thing to do for our school community and one of

1 the best possible ways to keep our schools open, which is
2 what we all want.

3 These steps combined with other legislative
4 asks I've presented to you today can help ensure our schools
5 and our communities are safe. In a time of crisis last
6 March, all of our duly elected legislators provided schools
7 with clarity and consistent statewide policy, and
8 protections for students, educators, and communities. We
9 urge you to take that action again.

10 PSEA stands ready to assist you with that
11 task, just like we did last spring. And I want to thank you
12 for your consideration. Thank you.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

14 We've been joined online by Representative
15 Gaydos, and here in person, Representative Madden.

16 And I think I will begin the questions, and I
17 will direct this first question to Dr. Hotchkiss and to John
18 Callahan. Just how prepared do you believe our schools are
19 to open in the fall?

20 MR. CALLAHAN: Sorry, I just had to --
21 hopefully you can hear me.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Did you hear the
23 question?

24 MR. CALLAHAN: Yes, I heard the question.

25 So we're doing -- I mean, everybody right

1 now, we were set from the second this happened, you know,
2 from the crisis mode of March, moving forward after the
3 crisis, then getting the directive from the Department that
4 we had to create pandemic plans, throughout the entire
5 summer planning and having the pandemic information shift
6 and continue to change, has required a tremendous amount of
7 work. Everybody that's on this -- everybody involved,
8 everybody that's part of this meeting and even testifiers
9 yesterday have been involved in every little facet of it.

10 How prepared are we? We're as prepared as
11 you possibly can be. I think schools are taking every
12 action they can, listening to every piece of advice, taking
13 the local data that's on the ground of what needs to be,
14 what decisions have to happen, what local decisions have to
15 happen within their community. And you're seeing it across
16 the state. You're seeing a myriad of different options
17 from, what I've been calling the new normal, of maybe you
18 have a split schedule or to the -- now, a lot of schools,
19 just within the most recent data numbers have switched to
20 virtual, completely online learning, you know, so you're
21 seeing that. And then you're also seeing, you know, the
22 decisions on sports. You're seeing the decisions on
23 everything. I mean, this is an ever changing situation that
24 we're attempting our best to make good decisions.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: What are you

1 hearing on the safety side as far as personal protection
2 equipment and any type of cleaning supplies in order to keep
3 the schools sanitary? Are we having any problems with that?

4 MR. CALLAHAN: We are hearing that there are
5 access problems there, and perhaps the super can talk a
6 little bit more.

7 But, I mean, a good example, one that -- I
8 talked to a school district recently, and they said, "We
9 were actually able to get ahold of all the hand sanitizer,
10 but then the pumps and equipment to actually disperse the
11 hand sanitizer is something we couldn't get ahold of yet."
12 So that's just a small example, but those are examples of
13 the challenges that we're facing on PPE.

14 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yeah. Good morning.

15 I'll give you an example. Today we finally
16 received misters that were used to clean the building, and
17 keep in mind we ordered those at the end of May and they
18 just now arrived.

19 And so we do have, for our district, some
20 limited supply, but what we're hearing from vendors is that
21 FEMA seems to be getting the readily available supplies for
22 their purposes. And so, in our instance, we have enough
23 supplies to open up the school year, but you know, we're
24 concerned about being able to get them as we get back to our
25 hybrid approach and making sure we can maintain our

1 stockpile of just cleaning supplies.

2 As far as being ready for school, listen,
3 we've been planning nonstop since May and it's been
4 relentless. And we're a smaller school district at
5 Bermudian Springs, and I have staff members doing things
6 that simply just aren't in their responsibility because they
7 care. And we're stretched thin, really thin, but we're
8 doing the best that we can.

9 And so for me, right now, I'm concerned about
10 staffing, staffing in that we have a lot of little details
11 that we need to put our plan in place and implement it. And
12 so, you know, the attention to detail is really important to
13 me. And so that's been a struggle.

14 We are having folks that select their
15 instructional model and that requires us to have a framework
16 in place and a foundation, then we have to respond to that.
17 You know, it's one of those things, we had a general idea of
18 the number of students that we felt were going to come back
19 to our -- we're K to 12 hybrid -- come back face to face,
20 those that would select our own Eagles Academy, and those
21 who would choose homeschooling or something else. And so,
22 you know, we're now responding to the numbers.

23 I put in an order for some technology in
24 preparation to support Eagles Academy. My first order, I
25 was told that laptops would not be in until November. Well,

1 that simply wasn't good enough, so we canceled that order.
2 And now we're looking to the end of August and September.

3 And I know we're not alone. This is a
4 worldwide, you know, crisis, not just pandemic, but being
5 able to get the supplies related to the technology needs.

6 And so I think it's important. Our
7 preparation is not without a lack of effort, but when we're
8 dealing with people -- and we've tried to be as flexible as
9 possible and people change their mind and people want to
10 respond differently to the things in our local community and
11 our environment, and we have to be nimble and flexible and
12 adapt to that. And when you have that approach, it makes
13 things a little bit more challenging. So we're doing the
14 absolute best that we can. And I know many of my colleagues
15 across the state are doing the exact same thing.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: So the answer is
17 you're about as ready as you could be under the
18 circumstances.

19 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yes.

20 MR. CALLAHAN: Yes.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Do you feel you've
22 gotten enough guidance from either the Department of
23 Education or Department of Health?

24 DR. HOTCHKISS: No. I know that they're
25 doing their best, to be quite honest. I get that. But you

1 heard many of us talking about just even the guidance on
2 face coverings or guidance on, you know, what's the process
3 and procedure if somebody has symptoms. And so I've kind of
4 worked through that just a little bit with the Department of
5 Health, and I felt really good about their response at the
6 time. However, the answer to us is that the Department of
7 Health will help you make decisions. They will help you --
8 they will conduct a contact tracing. You heard Mr. Askey
9 share, people want to know what that is. And to be quite
10 honest, I don't know what the process is other than we're
11 going to call the Department of Health, share the
12 circumstances, and then we're going to be guided as to what
13 to do from there.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

15 Representative Knowles.

16 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you very much,
17 Mr. Chairman. And again, I want to thank you for holding
18 the hearing yesterday, as well as the hearing today.

19 I have about a hundred questions, but I will
20 limit it to two, with your permission. They should require
21 short answers.

22 And my first question would be to Mr. Askey,
23 and I'm sure that he is aware that a number of national
24 teachers unions have issued demands suggesting schools not
25 reopen until three things were done, until lawmakers

1 defunded police, enacted Medicare for all, and I heard one
2 where they even were demanding that we ban charter schools.
3 And quite simply and honestly, I've not heard that any of
4 them are in Pennsylvania, but I would ask if you could share
5 your position on that.

6 MR. ASKEY: Sure. Thank you for the
7 question.

8 Yes, I've seen those same statements from
9 other unions.

10 We're focused, Representative, on getting our
11 schools opened as safely as possible. And we -- those are
12 the items that we are focused on. We're focused on making
13 sure that there's good practice in mask usage, hand washing,
14 social distancing. We're focused on what needs to be done
15 for Pennsylvania students, and we are, at this time, we are
16 laser focused on that.

17 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: So you disagree with
18 that statement?

19 MR. ASKEY: Yes, yes. We are not taking that
20 stand.

21 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Okay.

22 MR. ASKEY: We're ready to work with all of
23 you, all the people on this panel, to make sure that schools
24 are open. And that's where our focus is.

25 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: And I'm delighted

1 that you gave that answer, but I just think it was important
2 to get that on the record.

3 MR. ASKEY: Thank you for the question.

4 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: My second question
5 would be to Mr. Askey, as well as Mr. Callahan.

6 We all recognize how difficult it's going to
7 be until we get back to normal. And I've heard a number of
8 parents -- and I tend to agree -- that if we are to do
9 online learning and remote learning, we think, I think, that
10 teachers belong in the classroom even if it's an empty
11 classroom with only one person there assisting them with the
12 technology. I think that gives some kind of normalcy to the
13 whole process. And I'm wondering if there's been any
14 discussion, not teachers teaching from home remotely, but
15 having them in the classroom doing their job.

16 MR. ASKEY: If I may, because I have to share
17 with you that I teach in Harrisburg School District and that
18 is part of their plan in Harrisburg School District, to
19 bring the teachers in and have them teach from their
20 classrooms. And I just heard that Hazelton School District
21 has the same thing in their plan. So I know there is --
22 it's a local decision, but I know that that is occurring in
23 places.

24 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Mr. Chairman, I do
25 have questions, and if there's time after, I will ask them.

1 And maybe they'll be answered with other questions.

2 Thank you Mr. Chairman.

3 MR. CALLAHAN: And Representative, I'm sorry
4 my mic was muted there for a second.

5 But I want to say that one of the reasons
6 we're trying to get back to school, back to in the
7 classroom, is because there's multiple studies about the
8 importance of having students in face-to-face education, and
9 the benefits of that. So we all kind of know that in the
10 back of our head, knowing that that's one of the best ways
11 that we can educate students. We also have the conflict of
12 the pandemic, which is obviously getting in the way of that
13 and making decisions under that circumstance.

14 So I think right now, to your point, you're
15 seeing the focus on trying to get back in the classroom
16 because we know that's the right thing to do for students.
17 But right now, you're seeing those other options that
18 Mr. Askey talked about, where you have teachers in the
19 classroom, maybe they're on video and they're also doing
20 online education at the same time. And we're seeing that
21 across the states, by the way, what Mr. Askey was talking
22 about. We're seeing that in multiple school districts,
23 having that option for their students that don't feel
24 comfortable about coming in.

25 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you. And

1 again, I know this is not an easy challenge that you have
2 ahead of you.

3 And again, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
5 Representative.

6 Next will be Representative Miller.

7 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Thank you, Mr.
8 Chairman.

9 And thank you, sir. Thank you to everyone
10 who is joining us today. Thank you to everyone who is
11 joining us. I've got a couple and I'll try to be quick with
12 it.

13 Hey, John, do you have information about how
14 many schools are starting their own cyber academy or cyber
15 program in some way?

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: We can't hear you,
17 John.

18 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: I'm sure it's good
19 info, John.

20 MR. CALLAHAN: Sorry, I've got to get better
21 at that mute button. I apologize, this is the new dynamic
22 here.

23 We know that prior to the pandemic, we did a
24 survey through our State of Education Report. We knew that
25 90 percent of our school districts that we surveyed had an

1 online academy or an online education program. Since that
2 time, we've known many, many more have come onboard and
3 really built on online program.

4 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Okay. Over 90, then?

5 MR. CALLAHAN: Over 90.

6 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Yeah.

7 John, you also, I thought, in your testimony
8 you talked about liability for -- I thought you were trying
9 to -- there's a distinction between gross negligence and
10 negligence. Where were you drawing your line, John?

11 MR. CALLAHAN: Well, there are multiple, as
12 you know better than me, Representative, there are kind of
13 multiple tiers there between gross negligence and
14 negligence. And we are looking at, just like other
15 businesses across the state and other local governments and
16 there's a whole host out there, looking for some liability
17 protection in the case that we did everything we can to
18 prevent the spread of COVID, and through no fault of our
19 own, it was spread.

20 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: John, did you guys do
21 a survey of your members regarding their capabilities or
22 confidence in addressing these issues?

23 MR. CALLAHAN: We actually are out with a
24 survey right now. So I'm hopeful that by the end of the
25 week, we'll have results. I apologize. We don't have them

1 currently. We went out last week, but the turnaround time
2 is probably this Thursday -- well, today, and then we will
3 do the review of that data and hopefully have some results
4 by next week.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Yeah. I'd appreciate
6 it, John. We'd be -- I'd be very interested. I'm sure many
7 would.

8 I mentioned confidence for it, too. I think
9 that, in a general sense, confidence in so many ways is what
10 we need to talk about, whether it's being sure that teachers
11 feel confident about going back behind the desk, whether
12 it's parents feeling confident in sending their children to
13 school, whether it's people feeling confident going into
14 certain types of businesses. Understanding the confidence
15 issues and addressing those matters, I think, are key in all
16 of our recovery plans and going forward.

17 So I forget who had actually mentioned this
18 here with teachers, in particular. From what I understand,
19 if we are to be relying on a percentage, if there's going to
20 be a percentage of teachers who may not be available for
21 whatever the reason would be, we would have a substitute
22 teacher issue. And I think someone had talked about the
23 types of certifications that perhaps a substitute teacher
24 would need.

25 One of the questions or concerns I would

1 have, too, would be whether or not those substitute teachers
2 would have any requirement of, or whether they would be
3 covered under health insurance. So if you're going to rely
4 on three, four, five, six, seven percent of your teachers
5 perhaps not being available for periods of, perhaps lengthy
6 periods of the school year, would we also, especially in
7 relation to in-person learning, be bringing in a rather
8 large contingent, if we are to find them, of substitute
9 teachers who may or may not have health insurance?

10 MR. SAMPSON: I can speak from Titusville's
11 standpoint and most districts, most substitutes are not
12 offered health insurance across the state.

13 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Yeah.

14 MR. CALLAHAN: And, Representative, I can
15 speak to the -- you know, not only do we have a teacher
16 shortage, but we also have a substitute teacher shortage
17 problem, as well, across the state.

18 And then, third, I'll also comment on another
19 issue, another shortage is bus drivers, which is another
20 challenge. So you kind of see across the state -- that was
21 a challenge before the pandemic and it just continues to be
22 right now.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: On that vein of
24 thought with substitute teaching, has there been any
25 consideration in relation to how to involve student teachers

1 in a greater capacity? Is there any discussion, perhaps,
2 reaching out to those universities here in Pennsylvania to
3 try and perhaps alter the way some of the student teaching
4 has been done or structured so that they can perhaps come
5 into the system earlier or in a greater capacity to help
6 during this challenging school year, I'm sure?

7 (No response.)

8 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: I'll just take it as
9 "no."

10 On the financial side of special education,
11 one of the things that I've been hearing a lot from people,
12 to be honest, has been sort of a real concern that special
13 education has fallen through the floor in relation to the
14 spring, and concerns as to what changes are going to be made
15 in the fall to ensure that a child's IEP and FAPE is being
16 provided across the board.

17 Have there been discussions about the types
18 of compensatory options that could be supplementary in some
19 ways or how to analyze this in a more, in a quicker basis by
20 bringing up IEP meetings in the earlier part of the year?
21 Has there been any discussion on how to address what seems
22 to be a large scale concern of the IEP, of special education
23 in Pennsylvania?

24 (No response.)

25 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: If it's -- I'll take

1 it as "no." Okay.

2 MR. CALLAHAN: Well, Representative, if no
3 one else is going to talk about that, I think one of the
4 issues right now is there's a lot of school districts
5 definitely putting a lot of planning into special education.
6 And you are seeing some of those moves that you talked
7 about, occurring.

8 It's just -- and I'll say it, and you'll see
9 it in some of the planning. You'll see that specific area
10 of special ed being addressed, as well. And we've seen in
11 multiple plans across the state, and how they're going to
12 address special ed, whether it's in the building, spreading
13 the students out or various different ideas.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: I appreciate it,
15 John. You were mentioned at a hearing yesterday. I do
16 hope -- I know you're always available, but I do hope you'll
17 be attending or trying to attend as many discussions on
18 special education. I do believe we have some strong
19 concerns.

20 And I am personally concerned that -- again,
21 what happened in the spring also impacted, could have
22 impacted, a lot of evaluation that would have typically been
23 done. And I don't know how anybody goes through the first
24 two or three months of the school year without, with not
25 having an IEP meeting early in the year.

1 Speaking of that mental health, I'm
2 wondering -- one of the concerns that I've heard from people
3 has, of course, been in relation to different types of
4 isolation and the impact, perhaps in some degree, on staff,
5 of course, which is always paramount. We know that teachers
6 and everybody are so integral. But also, but perhaps in
7 this regard, more specifically towards kids and the lack of
8 that sort of in-person socialization.

9 So I'm wondering, are you aware of any
10 efforts by school districts, any discussions, for people in
11 relation to expanding discussions of mental health and
12 wellness in this new year to be able to provide supports for
13 students either with identified mental health issues or
14 those who unfortunately perhaps in some degree, whether it
15 be clinical or not, may be suffering from aspects of a
16 mental health challenge due to the COVID crisis?

17 DR. HOTCHKISS: I'll take that one.

18 You know, I think for us, and you know, many
19 districts, we've embedded a social/emotional learning
20 curriculum. And more times than not, it's at the elementary
21 level and you get into the middle school, and for us, it's K
22 to eight. You know, we're having conversations about
23 expanding that into the high school level because the
24 reality is the, everything you've described from the mental
25 health issue is a K-12 student issue. It's also a staffing

1 issue.

2 And so I've seen school districts, where one
3 of them, we've expanded partnerships with outside entities
4 that can provide mental health services in our schools. And
5 so we're trying to bring that counseling and the support
6 services into the facility so that our families have
7 immediate access. And when you're in a rural area, instead
8 of having to drive quite a distance to do that, you know,
9 we've fostered those partnerships. And I know the entities
10 are reaching out to try to bridge that gap. We definitely
11 know that is an issue.

12 In addition, with our staff, we're going to
13 encourage everybody to utilize our Employee Assistance
14 Program. It's there, you know, for a reason and this is a
15 great reason for people to make that call. And so we're
16 going to bring that up. We're going to encourage people to
17 use that for themselves, for their own children. But it is
18 definitely --

19 The reality is we're not going to know
20 exactly what our need is until we get folks back and we
21 start to have conversations. And I think you're seeing a
22 lot of school districts, you know, on Day One of school,
23 whatever that looks like, those are the conversations we're
24 going to be having versus understanding your letters and
25 your sounds and working through all those basic things. We

1 need to start to foster that relationship piece again with
2 students and staff, you know, in person and face to face.
3 So I definitely have seen school districts trying to develop
4 plans locally of how to meet those needs of students and
5 staff.

6 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: And, sir, I'm going
7 to close with one last topic real quick.

8 But the only thing I would ask for you, is --
9 I know you said you may not know the situation until
10 everybody returns. Obviously, for some school districts
11 that may not be forthcoming, or for some school districts,
12 you will only be there on a part-time basis with it.

13 To be honest with you, I believe the mental
14 health issue that I was referring to is impacting the kids
15 whether they are back at school or whether they are not.
16 And I do wonder if there isn't ways that we can coordinate
17 resources to engage, especially, those kids who you may be
18 at home instead of those kids who may be able to provide
19 direct in-person support.

20 The last thing I just wanted to mention is, I
21 believe it was the good gentleman who just spoke, I think,
22 who had referenced the challenges with the internet and the
23 challenges with technology. I know I have a bill on this
24 that I thought could be helpful.

25 Look, we know the broadband has been a

1 unifying issue. I think we've been -- to be honest, there
2 can be no other time for us as a legislature to be providing
3 that goal. But at the same token, we also have districts
4 like mine here in Pittsburgh. I had one district that was
5 four and a half weeks ahead of Pittsburgh, and those kids in
6 Pittsburgh got four and a half weeks or so less of education
7 last year because they had to go around begging, in my
8 words, begging for technology help. And they had to go
9 around finding out where they can get a hotspot or where
10 they could find these computers.

11 The reality of it here is, I think, this is
12 one of the paramount things, is that we can no longer accept
13 that a child in Pennsylvania is ready to learn if they do
14 not have a computer at home and they do not have access to
15 the internet at home. And that especially is true of the
16 roughly 270,000 kids who live in acute poverty in
17 Pennsylvania to which this challenge was more heightened for
18 many of them in regards to it. But we sit here with a
19 constitutional requirement. It is not really worded toward
20 the Governor or anybody else. It's the general assembly's
21 requirement to make sure that you and our kids who come have
22 everything you need to do the job and to learn and to be
23 ready going forward.

24 I very much appreciate your concern regarding
25 the technology. To be honest, we've -- I'm glad to hear

1 about all the work that you have done in advance of this.
2 But as referenced, time is short. For some school
3 districts, it's coming up very quickly and I really believe,
4 I hope the assembly will take some of your ideas and move
5 them forward quickly because I think we have lost a lot of
6 time to be able to address those issues and to address a
7 confidence matter, to which would really help in-person
8 learning, is by making people feel that they can be
9 reasonably safe going forward.

10 Thank you very much for the questions.

11 And, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the time.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Representative
13 Topper.

14 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Thank you, Mr.
15 Chairman.

16 My first question would be directed to
17 Dr. Hotchkiss because it's in specific relation to one of
18 your answers concerning flexible instruction days.

19 So with Act 13, to finish out the school
20 year, we basically said, "There will be unlimited flexible
21 instruction days," which means you can use the online
22 platforms however you can get the information to students.
23 They don't have to be in the buildings.

24 Now, with that, with the expiration of that
25 emergency school code, it was my understanding that we were

1 going back to, you know, as of right now, there were five
2 flexible instruction days. But then during your testimony,
3 you said you reached out to the Department of Education and
4 I seem to hear some conflicting things in what you said.

5 So you're asking us for more flexible
6 instruction days; and yet, you said the Department ruled
7 that you were able to have more than five flexible
8 instruction days. Could you clear that up for me, exactly
9 what you're looking for and what you feel right now you have
10 the authority to do?

11 DR. HOTCHKISS: Sure.

12 And so flexible instructional days is a
13 different conversation. We're actually, we were one of 80
14 school districts in Pennsylvania prior to this year that was
15 approved to use what was called a FID, which you're correct,
16 you had five of those days.

17 Right now districts across the Commonwealth
18 have the opportunity to apply for additional FID days or to
19 be approved to use FIDs moving forward. What we were
20 referencing is just the flexibility in the 180-day,
21 990-hour, 900-hour guide.

22 So we were confused. This is where we were
23 talking about guidance. Do we have the ability to provide
24 remote learning for districts who do not have flexible
25 instructional days? And even if we did, we were limited to

1 five.

2 And so as we were charged with developing
3 reopening plans, that was a pretty big question that we were
4 trying to figure out. We posed it to the Department of
5 Education. They came back with an opinion based on Section
6 520.1 of the School Code clarifying that school boards have
7 the authority to conduct remote learning during an emergency
8 to meet the instructional day and hour requirements.

9 What we're unsure is if the School Code must
10 be changed to allow for that flexibility because it was an
11 opinion by the department. And so what we really would like
12 is further clarification regarding that flexibility. So not
13 necessarily just the FID because FIDs are capped at five,
14 but the flexibility to truly offer a hybrid remote learning,
15 you know, option for school districts. That's what we're
16 seeking the specific guidance on.

17 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: So at the end --
18 look, as somebody who is pretty intimately familiar with Act
19 13, in some of those rooms in negotiations, Act 13 was
20 really designed to finish out a school year when we had very
21 little answers to any of our questions. I mean, we were all
22 scrambling to kind of grapple with COVID-19, what it meant,
23 what it looked like.

24 You know, these are no longer what I would
25 call Act 13 days. I mean, we have been now out there for

1 quite some time. Each school district was empowered with
2 the ability to come up with their own plan. And I fully
3 support that. I think one of the most frustrating things
4 from today's testimony as I'm reading it is, you know, "we
5 want more flexibility in some ways, we want more legislative
6 guidance in another." Not every school district is the
7 same.

8 I represent 10 school districts. I may be
9 one of the only legislators in the room that represents that
10 many school districts. And they are all different. They
11 all have different sizes, they all have different
12 transportation needs. You know, so I strongly support the
13 idea that our local elected school districts do have the
14 ability --

15 I know you guys aren't public health experts.
16 And you know, we have to vote on a lot of things that we're
17 not necessarily experts on. That's why we bring in experts
18 to try and guide us in making those decisions. And I think
19 local officials can do the same thing.

20 My concern is, as we look at the last two
21 months, what we did with Act 13, from your standpoint as a
22 superintendent, can you tell me that you felt that those two
23 months actually were what you would want in considering
24 educational days? In other words, the education that those
25 students were receiving, do you believe that should qualify?

1 Because I don't think there's any way we should waive the
2 180-day requirement. I mean, at some point, we have to make
3 sure our kids are getting an education. And I'm not so sure
4 that what I saw in the last two months from school districts
5 around the state, you know, they were getting something that
6 I would qualify as an instructional day.

7 You know, what are your thoughts?

8 DR. HOTCHKISS: Sure. I would agree.

9 I think that last spring was a learning
10 experience for many, many school districts. We got a
11 tremendous amount of feedback and we were asked to pivot to,
12 you know, provide supports and instruction for students
13 differently. You know, infrastructure impacted that. I
14 think many districts have learned from that. What you'll
15 see in the fall is a significant improvement of our delivery
16 instruction.

17 What our ask is -- I agree the 180 days
18 should stay. What we want to be sure of -- we're a K-12
19 hybrid school district, so when my students are not
20 physically attending school and they're at home and they're
21 connected to our LMS and they're working that content, that
22 that counts as a day of school for those students. That's
23 what we want to be sure of.

24 And it's not a flexible instructional day,
25 but to deliver any type of, you know -- in this case, a

1 hybrid approach -- we want to just make sure that that day
2 will count. And that was the example for our own -- in the
3 past, we've operated our own cyber program for a number of
4 years. And you know, we've taken attendance and we've
5 counted that instructional time based on a, you know,
6 variety of ways. We just want to make sure that that same
7 philosophy applies to what school will look like in the
8 fall.

9 So we're not necessarily asking for a
10 reprieve on the number of days and hours, but just making
11 sure that they count when students who are not physically
12 present, that that time and their experience and the
13 instruction is going to count towards that time.

14 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: And I'm fine with
15 allowing it to count as long as we believe, and you believe
16 as the experts in the field, that it is actually
17 accomplishing what those hours need to accomplish. We can't
18 go through an entire school year with our kids learning at
19 the level that they learned the last two months of the last
20 one.

21 And I have two kids in public school, so I
22 get to see it. I mean, they're absolutely -- if we're not
23 going to go back and do this in a way that we feel we can
24 educate kids, I mean, it would be my thought that, well, we
25 wait until we can and then at that point, we go 180 days

1 from there. And if that means next June, July, and August
2 we're in school, then so be it.

3 So, you know, when you guys are asking us to
4 kind of deliver legislative guidance or enact what we think,
5 you're going to get 203 ideas of what we think should
6 happen.

7 I still believe that from my standpoint,
8 allowing our local districts to work with their local
9 experts and figure it out is still the best way to go. But
10 if it does get thrown in our lap, then I'm prepared to
11 engage in that, but it might not be exactly what everybody
12 wants or asks for.

13 So, you know, I'm happy to continue to work,
14 as I know the Chairman is by having these hearings. I think
15 this is important, but I think we all have to come to an
16 understanding.

17 And look, I very seldom make commentary. I'm
18 one of those guys that when it comes time for questions, I
19 like to ask questions as opposed to making comments. But in
20 this case, I will make a comment.

21 It is absolutely vital that we come to an
22 understanding of what it is to educate our kids. The cyber
23 charters testified yesterday that they are just about capped
24 out as to how many students they can receive. So these kids
25 are going to be there. I mean, they are either going to be

1 engaged with your cyber programs, as far as our traditional,
2 you know, K through 12 publics, or they're going to be there
3 face-to-face or they're going to be having to deal with
4 these hybrids.

5 If they go another three, four months in our
6 educational experience, based on what I saw from last
7 spring, and they're not able to continue to learn and be
8 taught what they need for their level, we are going to lose
9 an entire year of education for these kids and we're talking
10 about compounding a public health crisis with more crisis on
11 top of it.

12 And so I think, I'm impassioned about it, and
13 I think it's absolutely incumbent that we come together, and
14 specifically at the local level, and find a way to make sure
15 that it is the absolute best education that these kids can
16 receive. And yes, by God, we're all going to have to make
17 some sacrifices in order for that to happen and I hope we're
18 prepared to do so.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
21 Representative.

22 Representative Ortitay.

23 REPRESENTATIVE ORTITAY: Thank you, Mr.
24 Chairman.

25 And thank all of you for being here today.

1 Over the last few months, I've been doing a
2 lot of research on schools reopening, not just in the
3 country, but across the world. And there's been a bunch of
4 different openings, different stories, different results.
5 The only thing I'm sure of is I'm not sure of anything.
6 There's just been so many different things that have
7 happened in different counties with testing, you know,
8 different requirements for PPE, no requirements for PPE,
9 kids testing positive, teachers testing positive.

10 And one of the things I wanted to bring up,
11 I'm not sure that PDE has provided this or the Department of
12 Health. I've had this conversation with several of the
13 superintendents, so I guess I'll direct this to you,
14 Dr. Hotchkiss.

15 What guidance has been given to school
16 districts when you, when a student or a teacher inevitably
17 tests positive for COVID-19? Because it probably will
18 happen. And one of my major concerns is that we open the
19 schools back up, you get kids or teachers that test
20 positive, at what point are schools going to say, "We're
21 done, we're shutting down again"?

22 DR. HOTCHKISS: So it's been my experience so
23 far, the guidance that we've received is to call the
24 Department of Health. And I've done that. I've had the
25 experience of doing that.

1 They immediately called back and asked a
2 series of questions. And one of the key questions that was
3 asked was, "Is the person that was exhibiting" -- in this
4 case -- "some symptoms, have they had direct known contact
5 with somebody who tested positive for COVID?" And based on
6 that response, they indicated it would dictate how we handle
7 that. That was greatest extent of the guidance we received.
8 And we keep hearing that it will be handled on a
9 case-by-case basis, about what to do, how to determine who's
10 been in close contact. And we have not received any metrics
11 regarding -- it will take X amount of cases to close down a
12 school, to close down a district. We have not received that
13 guidance.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ORTITAY: Is that something
15 that you would like to see come down from the state or is it
16 something you would prefer to keep at a local level?

17 DR. HOTCHKISS: I think all of us would like
18 some type of metrics. And so you also have to be careful
19 what you wish for because you would lock yourself in.

20 And I know, I've been in calls with the
21 Department of Health, and they gave an example of, in a
22 local community, there was an outbreak in a prison that
23 caused a number of cases locally to skyrocket. And they
24 gave the example of, if we would have just given an exact
25 number of cases to close a school, we knew in this case,

1 those incidents wouldn't have impacted the school. That was
2 an example that we were provided for a reason not to provide
3 numbers, but certainly, I mean, everybody is asking. You
4 heard Mr. Askey ask that question, "What are the metrics?"
5 And that, certainly whether people agree or disagree with
6 it, at least we would know what they are.

7 You know, so I'm fully prepared. You know,
8 back in the day, calling for a snow day was something that I
9 hated to do, and I probably would take that right now over
10 most things. But what's it going to look like in the
11 morning if we have a number of staff members who all of a
12 sudden have symptoms and have to stay home? What's the
13 number for me to have to close school for the day based on
14 that? I don't necessarily have numbers, because it's going
15 to come down to substitutes. But it's a very real reality
16 for many districts that we're going to be facing, but there
17 are no numbers associated with it. You're making a judgment
18 call on that case.

19 REPRESENTATIVE ORTITAY: And that's just
20 something that I wanted to bring, or shed some light on to.
21 Because you know, you look at the cases in Israel, I believe
22 they had one positive test one week and the next week they
23 had over a hundred. And with the lagging test results and
24 people not being able to get tested as quickly as possible,
25 or at least as we'd like to in the state of Pennsylvania,

1 that's my concern, is you send a bunch of kids in, they all
2 test positive. And the next week you've got 500 kids.

3 What I'm trying to do is provide some sort of
4 expectation for parents and for the schools to kind of know
5 what's going on here if there are, if there is a breakout or
6 there is a hotspot in the area.

7 And again, I'm not saying a school shouldn't
8 reopen. I think that they should. I just want to make sure
9 that the school districts and everybody is planning in the
10 event that something like that comes up or they're prepared
11 if there is one or two tests. Because you know, as well as
12 I do, the second there's one positive test in a school
13 district, parents are going to lose their minds and demand
14 answers, as well as teachers and staff included in that.

15 So I just want to make sure that everyone is
16 prepared for that and that, you know, the world isn't coming
17 to an end if one kid tests positive for this.

18 My other question, and I guess I'll end with
19 this, and it kind of goes around teaching.

20 I know that there are some teachers that
21 don't feel comfortable going back into the classroom. Have
22 they been given the option to teach remotely, to teach
23 online, to maybe tutor or check up on kids who are in cyber
24 schools through the school? Have they been given that
25 opportunity?

1 MR. ASKEY: I'll go ahead and take that from
2 my perspective and then perhaps the other panelists can fill
3 in.

4 I have seen a variety of how things like that
5 are being handled. That's why we probably need a little
6 more guidance from the state level on that.

7 I have members that, yes, they have been
8 given some options for remote learning and remote teaching
9 for tutoring and things like that. But I also receive,
10 every day I'm receiving e-mails from some of our members
11 that are not getting those options.

12 Now, we are still four -- three, four weeks
13 out so we are still helping them have the conversations with
14 the districts leadership that they need to have. But it
15 just depends where you are and the relationship in the
16 district.

17 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yes.

18 And I'll speak for our district. We're
19 actively, as I shared, we're actively collecting the
20 information from our parents on the instructional models
21 that they chose.

22 And so when we have students that are opting
23 out of the face-to-face instruction and going into our own
24 Eagles Academy, you know, they don't necessarily all do that
25 at the same grade level. And so we still have to have

1 teachers in classrooms.

2 And so, you know, we're looking, for us, to
3 how many students at a grade level would be opting out and
4 will that allow us to be able to use a teacher differently
5 and be creative with that. And you know, that's our
6 approach.

7 However, that becomes more challenging at the
8 secondary level because now, you know, you could be down a
9 period maybe, but you still have to have that content
10 because of the department structures. So I think many
11 districts are actively collecting the information and we're
12 going to do everything we can to make accommodations and
13 that's one of those stresses that we have because it's just
14 going to take time to work through all that. It's taking
15 time to understand the needs of all of our employees and
16 it's really important that we do. And I think most of us
17 would like to make accommodations, but the reality is we may
18 not be able to do that for everybody. And then how do you
19 prioritize?

20 If you have a group of people who want to
21 make accommodations, well, who gets first? Who gets second?
22 So I know that we're working through that and my colleagues
23 are doing the same because we all care about our teachers,
24 we all care about our kids. We all want to try to make
25 those accommodations and it's really, over the next couple

1 of weeks, it will tease itself out based on numbers and
2 availability and how flexible we can be.

3 MR. CALLAHAN: And, Representative, my two
4 colleagues said it perfectly before us, we're also seeing
5 that same trend and those same decisions across the state.
6 As we get closer, Dr. Hotchkiss said it perfectly, those
7 decisions are going to get more and more immediate. So
8 we're starting to see that all across the state.

9 MR. SAMPSON: And I would just add, as we see
10 more of that, that was one of the reasons we need some
11 flexibility and certifications being able to move teachers
12 around as needed.

13 REPRESENTATIVE ORTITAY: All right. Thank
14 you.

15 Thank you Mr. Chairman.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: We've also been
17 joined online by Representative Hill-Evans.

18 And next is Representative McCarter.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you very
20 much, Mr. Chairman.

21 And again, I thank you all for your testimony
22 today. It's been very enlightening. In fact, I think the
23 last discussion was a very good one as to realizing that
24 we're professional baseball trying to go back into
25 operation. And a 113-page manual of various different

1 protocols and responses as to what happens when someone
2 comes down with, is tested positive.

3 We now look at Pennsylvania and realizing
4 much like the professional baseball league, we have 501
5 leagues operating with different responses that are going to
6 take place across the state and the absolute difficulty of
7 that I completely empathize -- sympathize with your
8 responses in how you're trying to deal with this across the
9 state.

10 If I could, there's a couple of different
11 questions here that I'd like to try to address, if possible.

12 One, going back to, I think, Dr. Hotchkiss,
13 you mentioned that you're anticipating somewhere in the
14 neighborhood of \$600 million of lost revenue to local school
15 districts because of cyber charter, increased cyber charter
16 costs. Could you comment some more on that and give us some
17 clarity?

18 DR. HOTCHKISS: I could comment on it. I
19 think Mr. Callahan actually talked about it.

20 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Oh, maybe it was --
21 if it was Mr. Callahan, whoever mentioned that.

22 MR. SAMPSON: That was actually in some of my
23 testimony -- this is Mr. Sampson -- in regards to the
24 increase of potential cyber enrollment, and that simply is a
25 projection if enrollment doubled. As we heard from the

1 testimony yesterday, due to caps and so forth, that's
2 probably not likely. It is a concern dealing with those
3 increases within a budget that, you know, we already have a
4 lot of challenges with.

5 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Okay. And as we
6 heard yesterday, most of those caps, all of those caps, I
7 think, with the exception of Pennsylvania Cyber Charter, are
8 self-imposed caps. So I assume from your budgeting
9 standpoints that you're looking at, it's very hard to know
10 whether, in fact, many of those cyber charter schools, in
11 fact, are increasing their enrollment beyond what the
12 projections are and their self-imposed caps.

13 MR. SAMPSON: Yes, it's very difficult. As a
14 matter of fact, we just received a new enrollment today. So
15 we find out as they enroll.

16 And to just to give you a little context, you
17 know, we do have the cyber charter enrollment issue, but out
18 of approximately 2,000 students, we have right now over 400
19 students that are interested in online learning and not
20 coming back into the classroom. Prior to this, we were
21 really ramping up our own cyber program. But what we've
22 done, because, you know, a lot of these families, they want
23 to cyber learn, but they still want to be connected to their
24 school.

25 So we kind of have two things going on. We

1 have our cyber learning and where they're connected, whether
2 they're elementary or secondary or high school, and then we
3 have our separate, completely separate cyber learning that
4 we call Rocket Online Campus. So we kind of have two paths
5 there.

6 But to your point, without debating the
7 issues behind cyber learning and the costs and so forth, it
8 is straight forward budget issues that come forward kind of
9 at the last minute. And you know, when we have declining
10 revenues, we literally have to cut or do other maneuvers
11 financially to balance that budget.

12 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Okay.

13 And a second area I'd like to address, if we
14 could, is the PPE needs that was addressed a little bit
15 earlier, and the fact that we are seeing some shortages and
16 so on.

17 Is there any -- are there school districts
18 that are banding together to try to order together or are we
19 having 501 school districts all ordering on their own
20 individually in terms of all the PPE needs?

21 MR. SAMPSON: I can speak for Titusville. We
22 have not banded together. I don't think it's a bad idea,
23 however you need the organization there to do that.

24 I'll give you an example. We just had some
25 PPE that we ordered. We got notice that it was confiscated

1 at Customs. So we're bumping into all kinds of problems
2 when we're trying to get this stuff in.

3 I think it's an interesting idea. I think
4 supplies, while it freed up for a while, we seem to be
5 bumping into some new restrictions now because I think
6 everybody is getting ready to go back and so forth. And I
7 can -- I'll just speak on technology quickly.

8 Obviously, we have a need for Chromebooks and
9 laptops and so forth. We are getting pushed out. The last
10 order is off the middle of October and that was ordered some
11 time in July. And of course, we're up against some federal
12 stimulus guidelines that say we have to spend it by
13 October 30th. So those, everything is kind of mixed
14 together to create a real panic and shortage when trying to
15 get these types of items.

16 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: And how will we
17 address the issue, if those PPE needs are not, or the masks
18 and other things that are required, as part of the guidance,
19 if they're not available, will that shut down classrooms?

20 MR. SAMPSON: I'll speak just as a business
21 manager.

22 We feel we have the supplies needed to get
23 started. Certainly, we want to keep everybody safe. That
24 would have to be evaluated if we would run into shortages.
25 However, right now, we have enough that we believe we can

1 operate through December anyways.

2 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: And again, if I
3 could ask Mr. Askey. I think -- how are you seeing how
4 employees will be treated once they're identified, will
5 their health cost be continued beyond -- normally, I think
6 in contracts, often it's only 30 days or whatever the case
7 may be in the contract. What kind of guidance are we seeing
8 there in terms of how people will be treated within
9 districts?

10 MR. ASKEY: Well, we have -- we know that
11 they can get the 14 days from the federal government under
12 this -- no, 10 days, excuse me. They are just going to have
13 to go by their contracts, Representative McCarter. If they
14 have sick days -- that's why we are asking for some
15 flexibility in granting people, if they come in contact and
16 have to be quarantined, and they don't have enough sick
17 days, there should be some kind of method for them to
18 continue on.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: It would be
20 critical, it seems. Otherwise, you're going to have people
21 potentially who are still infected with COVID being forced
22 back into the classroom, if that be the need, without taking
23 obviously the obvious problems that so many people have at
24 the present moment of choosing between work or quarantining
25 going on.

1 MR. CALLAHAN: Representative, to your
2 previous comment on PPE, there's a lot of innovative things
3 going on. Yeah, we do know of other school districts that
4 are banding together to buy PPE. And I'll even give you the
5 computer side of things.

6 There are a few school districts partnering
7 to buy computers and there's been innovative things. I
8 mean, we just got a donation of hundreds of thousands of
9 masks to give out to school districts. Another group, I'm
10 aware of, actually takes donated computers, wipes them
11 clean, and gives them to socially economically challenged
12 communities. And so you're seeing that in school districts.

13 School districts are trying everything they
14 can and trying to be innovative in the face of some big
15 struggles right now.

16 DR. HOTCHKISS: And if I may add, for us,
17 we're at the Lincoln Intermediate Unit. Our intermediate
18 unit brought all school districts together and we did try to
19 go out and get bids and quotes for all PPE. So we're at 26
20 school districts, just as an example.

21 And so I would think that the IU does that
22 for a number of items, you know, through the course of a
23 regular school year. In our region, we did do that through
24 our intermediate unit for PPE.

25 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: It's very

1 difficult, I know, because in talking with one
2 superintendent, as he began planning for what we were doing
3 last spring, realized that he might as well just go ahead
4 and order as much material as he could to cover for this
5 current school year. So you have some school districts, I'm
6 aware, that have enough PPE for more than six months of the
7 year and others who are just beginning to order, which is
8 unfortunate, as well.

9 One last area that I, let me kind of just
10 touch on. And again, it's a broader one.

11 I had a parent who called me not, just a few
12 days ago, with two autistic boys age 20, or actually, 21.
13 And they would be, this year would be -- they're going into
14 their 21st year. So they would be going into their
15 transition year of going out without services. And yet, we
16 all know that for much of the case for many of the special
17 ed students, extreme situations, they're not getting the
18 full services that they require. And as a result, they're
19 going to miss their transition year. And so it leads to the
20 inevitability of thinking about how we need to extend those
21 services for the future for those individuals. And for
22 quite honestly, as I think, earlier Representative Topper
23 was suggesting in a sense, we're all aware that students are
24 losing a tremendous amount of learning through the COVID
25 crisis. And we need to start thinking about the reality,

1 and maybe you already have -- and that's, I guess, my
2 question.

3 What are those things that we could do
4 looking forward, once we get past this initially here to try
5 to recover that time. Do we need an extension of another
6 year? Do we give parents the option of allowing their
7 children to repeat a grade? Do we give the opportunity for
8 students to almost have a grade 13, if you will, to
9 graduate? Is that something that anybody has given some
10 thought to yet?

11 (No response.)

12 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: I guess not.

13 DR. HOTCHKISS: Definitely a thought that
14 we've had a conversation -- just how can we support
15 students, all students, you know, learning support students,
16 to try to address deficits? And so, you know, we've had
17 conversations about what might evening tutoring look like to
18 provide an extension? Recognizing, though, that students
19 that are learning all day long and then trying to extend the
20 school day, but it's certainly a conversation that we have
21 to have.

22 Obviously, opportunities for the summertime
23 to make up, try to just give a high quality, you know,
24 interaction with kids. And so, those are things that we're
25 looking at. Obviously, each school district would be up to

1 them as far as financially, if they could do that, but it's
2 important. I like the idea of what can we do in the
3 evening. And I also think that that could be an
4 opportunity. We talked earlier about how could we make
5 accommodations for staff members. That could be an
6 opportunity for additional staff members to serve in that
7 capacity in the evening to provide -- I don't want to say
8 remediation, but the ability for students to catch up to
9 assess deficits.

10 You know, we have progress monitoring that
11 has to take place. What does that look like? So that we
12 can truly understand where the deficits are and come up with
13 a plan to, not remediate, but just accelerate that learning.

14 And, yeah, I think most people, you know, we
15 want to try to meet the needs of students. And for us, that
16 even extends to our -- we have an ELL population. And so in
17 our hybrid option, we are providing five days of instruction
18 for learning support, emotional support, ELL students,
19 because we recognize that we have work to do. We need to be
20 able to meet the needs of those students.

21 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you all very,
22 very much for your answers and your testimony.

23 And again, as we're all aware, we're facing
24 an unprecedented situation. And again, I know everybody is
25 trying to do the best they possibly can with unfortunately

1 not all the resources that we'd like to have in this
2 situation, but as we move forward, hopefully we can, in the
3 legislature, come together and get those resources and get
4 past this as quickly as possible. Thank you very much.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

7 Representative Madden.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MADDEN: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 My first question is for Mr. Callahan.
11 Mr. Callahan, we're seeing that every state that has started
12 sending kids back to school has seen cases immediately the
13 first day. Possibly the largest was in Gwinnett County,
14 Georgia, where, after the first day, either 260 employees or
15 students had tested positive or had been exposed to the
16 coronavirus. Also in Georgia, they had the month before
17 gone to a sleepaway camp and 266 children tested positive.

18 My question to you is, are you getting any
19 direction from the Pennsylvania Department of Education or
20 the Department of Health or any assurances that when you
21 start seeing tests, start seeing children or staff members
22 exhibit symptoms, that there will be tests for them, or will
23 they have to go through the process of finding their local
24 clinic or their local hospital and going home and getting a
25 swab test and not knowing anywhere from three to ten days

1 whether or not they're positive? Are there any exceptions
2 being made to try to help students and school employees?

3 MR. CALLAHAN: Not that we're aware of right
4 now. That has been a question around saying that, "hey, can
5 you get tests in schools," but schools are not the best
6 places to do that.

7 So, yes, teachers and staff will have to go
8 to their local testing station --

9 REPRESENTATIVE MADDEN: Right.

10 MR. CALLAHAN: -- and get tested.

11 REPRESENTATIVE MADDEN: I wasn't suggesting
12 they would get tested in school. I was asking did you get
13 any guidance as to where they would be able to go, if there
14 were going to be increases for testing now that we're going
15 back to school, and is there any guidance into where would
16 be the quickest place for them to go to get the fastest
17 turnaround test.

18 MR. CALLAHAN: Not that I'm aware of right
19 now.

20 REPRESENTATIVE MADDEN: Okay. Thank you.

21 The other question I have is, I have three
22 school districts in my district. And I have heard from
23 every single one of them that the -- and Representative Kim
24 referred to this yesterday when she spoke about -- and also
25 Secretary Rivera mentioned this in a meeting that we had

1 with our caucus, that there's work in the community to find
2 churches and VFW halls and other areas where they might be
3 able to hold schools, where there would be greater social
4 distancing or where children would be able to go after
5 school where they could social distance for parents who
6 economically just simply can't afford to stay home or can't
7 afford child care in lieu of their children not being in
8 school.

9 Is the Pennsylvania Department of Education
10 having any meaningful conversations around trying to
11 coordinate this program of finding larger spaces where
12 children can socially distance in a more meaningful way?
13 Because I know in one of my school districts, we're talking
14 about capping 25 -- not 25 children, but 25 people in a
15 classroom. And to me, I just don't even see how that could
16 maintain any type of social distancing.

17 DR. HOTCHKISS: It's definitely been a
18 conversation. But outside of that, I've received no other
19 communication or direction about coordinating efforts for
20 that from the department.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MADDEN: Okay. Thank you very
22 much.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
25 Representative.

1 Next will be Representative Isaacson.

2 REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON: Thank you, Mr.
3 Chairman.

4 And Representative McCarter started to touch
5 upon my question, but I think we need to delve into it a
6 little deeper. And it's with regard to teachers and staff
7 and their contracts and their ability to work and the
8 environment they're going to be placed in.

9 We've talked a lot about, in these past five
10 months, who our first responders are and our essential
11 employees. And now we're about to send our teachers and the
12 staff in all of these buildings back to work with a
13 potential exposure to this disease. And I want to talk a
14 little bit about how are we going to handle their ability to
15 come to work, what's in their contracts with regard to their
16 days off should somebody become sick? I know this is also
17 going to affect some of the higher education facilities
18 also. But -- and also that's -- we're putting these
19 teachers and the staff in a position of choosing between
20 their health and being able to keep food on their table.
21 Are they going to be paid if they're exposed at the school
22 and have to quarantine or when they get sick and might have
23 further illnesses that may keep them out for an extended
24 period of time? How are those going to be handled?

25 So I guess that maybe, perhaps, Mr. Callahan,

1 you might want to address that?

2 MR. CALLAHAN: And I think that's being
3 handled in so many different ways across the state. We kind
4 of alluded a little bit to that as we get closer to opening
5 of schools. There are individual contracts that are
6 occurring and they are very different across the state.
7 Even the way we're doing online learning is being done
8 differently across the state. So you're seeing it different
9 ways across each community.

10 REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON: And I appreciate
11 that. I just wanted to know is that something collectively
12 being worked on or are we doing this in 501 different school
13 districts? And there might be inconsistencies. After all,
14 some of these employees, certainly staffs in one school
15 district might be represented by the same union in a
16 different school district. Is that something you need
17 direction from us to help handle or is there something --
18 you know, what guidance do you want to give us on that?

19 MR. CALLAHAN: I mean, right now there is
20 guidance from the state, guidance from the feds, there's
21 even a work group document. There's all kinds of -- and you
22 can go to CHOP for other guidance. There's a lot of
23 guidance out there directing us on six feet, five feet,
24 masks, everything. Each school district is taking all of
25 that into play in order to kind of put together their plan.

1 Is there a universal way that people are
2 handling each thing? No. I think each community is
3 handling it according to the amount of cases they have, the
4 data, and how their community is able to handle it the best
5 way they can.

6 I mean, their buildings are all different.
7 Let's go into that. Buildings and structures are all very
8 different across the state, where some schools can manage to
9 have six foot of distance if they bring in all their
10 students, whereas other ones, that's certainly not going to
11 happen. You're going to have to bring in half the district
12 in order to meet those social distancing protocols.

13 So it is being handled differently across the
14 state.

15 REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON: Okay. But nothing
16 is being done to talk about, with regard to teachers and
17 staff and their employment and dealing with the contracts or
18 anything that might come of this pandemic that, addressing
19 their ability to get paid and have their health insurance be
20 continued? I understand the expense is to the school
21 districts with regard to covering them during their possible
22 absence after they're exposed on the job.

23 So perhaps Mr. Askey might want to be able to
24 weigh in on this a little?

25 MR. ASKEY: Yeah.

1 I think it's a good question because I think
2 there's not enough answers to your question, to be very
3 honest with you.

4 For instance, if one of my members gets,
5 contracts COVID-19, workman's comp probably is not an option
6 because you have to prove that you contracted it in the
7 classroom. And that's going to be, of course, difficult to
8 prove.

9 So there are not enough answers. And I know
10 my members would like, would appreciate some guidance at the
11 state level on how we deal with this because we have -- look
12 at it this way, we have like, say you get a new teacher in
13 who only has but a handful of sick days yet. They haven't
14 accumulated any of them. They become infected or they have
15 to quarantine, they may not even have enough sick days to
16 get through that time period.

17 So it is a great concern to our members, I
18 will tell you that, Representative.

19 REPRESENTATIVE ISAACSON: Well, it's of grave
20 concern to me because what you just described is something
21 that I would be concerned about considering many of our new
22 teachers are coming out of school with massive debt and if
23 they have to worry about losing their job because they got
24 sick on the job, it's something that we, as policymakers,
25 should be taking up, as well as the staff that works in the

1 buildings, not just the teachers.

2 So hopefully we'll take that up in our
3 further discussions next week.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
6 Representative.

7 Representative Gleim.

8 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you for being
9 here today. I just have a couple of questions. My first
10 one is to Mr. Askey.

11 Do you consider teachers and staff essential?

12 MR. ASKEY: Well, that's kind of an
13 interesting question, but teaching and learning is essential
14 to what we're doing and that means that if anybody is
15 essential, we need to make sure that they're having the
16 appropriate protections when they enter the building.

17 Our teachers are so anxious to get back and
18 see their students. Every member I talk to, that's the
19 first thing that comes out of their mouth. "We want to go
20 back, we want to see our children, we want to see our
21 colleagues."

22 But the second thing that happens is they are
23 worried, as I said in my testimony earlier. They are very
24 concerned that there's not enough strict guidelines that are
25 universal to whether it's three feet, six feet, wear a mask,

1 don't wear a mask. There's -- it's all over the place, and
2 they have that concern.

3 But they need to -- if someone is essential,
4 you need to protect them.

5 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Sure.

6 I mean, at the beginning of the pandemic, you
7 know, the Administration sort of deemed which entities were
8 essential and which ones weren't. So you had, of course,
9 your health-care workers, you have your police and fire,
10 trashmen were essential, grocery store employees were
11 essential. And I would agree with you, I would say that
12 teachers are essential. And they need to be teaching
13 students.

14 And so along that line, if they are these
15 front-line workers, do you believe that these workers should
16 be given the same type of immunity that the Administration
17 gave to other front-line workers?

18 MR. ASKEY: Can you give me an example of
19 what you're referring to, please?

20 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Well, a lot of the
21 hospital front-line workers were given immunity protections
22 from liability -- liability immunity protections. And I'm
23 just wondering if you believe --

24 MR. ASKEY: Oh.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: -- that teachers and

1 nurses in the schools should also be given those same type
2 of protections.

3 MR. ASKEY: Well, if someone gets infected in
4 a school building, they need to be taken care of, plain and
5 simple.

6 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Sure.

7 And then along those same lines --

8 MR. ASKEY: I mean --

9 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: I'm sorry.

10 MR. ASKEY: -- the difference between some of
11 the examples, if I may, is that these school buildings,
12 you're putting in hundreds of people in the same building.
13 So we have to -- so it's everybody's responsibility to make
14 sure the protections are in there.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Sure. That's the same
16 as hospitals, too.

17 Has anyone actively petitioned PEMA to
18 mobilize at the same levels that they did in April and May
19 to schools for PPE, that you know of?

20 MR. ASKEY: I don't. But perhaps one of the
21 other panelists does.

22 MR. CALLAHAN: No, I'm not aware of that,
23 but, Representative, that's an interesting idea.

24 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yeah, I'm not aware either.

25 MR. SAMPSON: I know not directly related to

1 that, but I do know our district received some PPE from
2 County Emergency Management.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Correct. Okay, thank
4 you.

5 And last, this is mostly from my district and
6 some surrounding areas. Many of the children are learning
7 from home, whether it's a choice of theirs or if their
8 school district is going fully remote. And some parents are
9 concerned that they're going to be responsible for some of
10 the supplies that are going to be needed for the curriculum
11 remotely.

12 And I was wondering, Mr. Askey, if PSEA
13 supports assisting, especially the low-income families, with
14 these new educational expenses?

15 MR. ASKEY: Absolutely. I mean, I --
16 Representative, I'm a teacher in Harrisburg School District.
17 And I have seen firsthand for over 32 years the needs of
18 this, of my community where I teach. And any assistance
19 that we can give those folks so their children can be
20 successful would be important to have.

21 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you.

22 That's all I have.

23 MR. CALLAHAN: And, Representative, I mean,
24 going into the struggle of just the technology end of
25 things, that has been a huge struggle across the state and

1 many of our challenged school districts. It's not easy and
2 it's very expensive, obviously, to get that equipment into
3 the hands of children. A lot of our school districts
4 accomplish that, but not all.

5 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you.

6 DR. HOTCHKISS: And I'll just add to that, I
7 believe we just got a waiver for the National School Lunch
8 Program, but if those students are at home learning
9 remotely, I would also like to be able to provide them
10 meals. And how do we do that if we're having meals here in
11 school and we have to have staff to do that? But that is
12 also extremely important to be able to provide for our
13 students, not just supplies, but you know, food at home.

14 MR. SAMPSON: I'd like to stress that point,
15 as well.

16 We're in a very rural area and we have plans
17 and we're working on plans to be able to deliver meals.
18 However, we have some questions as to whether we have to
19 deliver meals every day. And certainly packaging them so we
20 don't have to make those deliveries every single day would
21 be helpful relief that we could give someone.

22 MR. CALLAHAN: And to that point, nobody
23 really spoke about the food issue today. That was another
24 huge undertaking for many school districts. It's really
25 impressive. The school districts really stepped up to do

1 that.

2 But to that point further is we have another
3 challenge potentially coming with the reopening of our
4 school buildings. And on the federal end, it would be
5 appreciated to have some flexibility. I believe that's in
6 the mix, hopefully, when it comes to continued, you know,
7 talking about this second stimulus, some flexibility on the
8 food end, the food delivery end of the programs.

9 MR. SAMPSON: And just to point out, it's not
10 just the -- obviously, feeding is our main goal, but without
11 participation in these lunch programs, many of them start to
12 run up huge deficits, those deficits then go over to the
13 general fund and create issues and barriers to us to provide
14 learning, as well.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Representative
17 Staats.

18 REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: Thank you, Chairman
19 Sonney.

20 And thank you to our panelists for your
21 testimony today.

22 And I'm going to refer to testimony from the
23 Pennsylvania Catholic Conference. And in this, they state
24 that nonpublic schools are planning to return to school
25 in-person in the fall. And as public school districts

1 discuss different approaches to returning, as we're doing
2 today, such as hybrid scheduling and virtual learning,
3 nonpublic schools are very concerned about some of the
4 services that these districts provide, such as nursing,
5 transportation, books, et cetera.

6 So my question focuses on the nursing piece.
7 And within their testimony, the Pennsylvania Catholic
8 Conference states, and rightfully so, that all schools, both
9 public and nonpublic, must start with a school nurse on-site
10 and some of those duties would be to review plans and make
11 sure schools are compliant with all CDC, Department of
12 Health, and local guidelines. The school nurse will also
13 need to monitor anyone who enters the building and many
14 other duties.

15 So my question, and I guess I would pose this
16 to Mr. Askey and/or Mr. Callahan, have these conversations
17 taken place regarding these services and if so, is this
18 going to be a cooperative effort or is legislation going to
19 be needed?

20 MR. ASKEY: Honestly, I'm not aware of any of
21 those conversations occurring, however, Mr. Callahan might
22 have a better perspective on it.

23 MR. CALLAHAN: We've encouraged our members
24 while they're making their plans, reach out, because a good
25 example beyond just the private schools is, you know,

1 "you're going to be sending students to a CTC or an
2 intermediate unit, you need to coordinate those bus
3 schedules, you need to coordinate those protocols." And the
4 same thing goes for private schools, parochial schools, and
5 charters, as well, brick-and-mortar charters. So we've
6 encouraged our members to do that. But I honestly am not
7 aware of how those discussions are going.

8 REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: Thank you for that.

9 And I just want to bring up --

10 DR. HOTCHKISS: I'll add to that.

11 REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: Go ahead, please.

12 DR. HOTCHKISS: Part of the -- one of the
13 requirements for the cares funding to grants that came
14 through earlier this spring was a set aside for nonpublic
15 schools. So we had to engage in conversations with those
16 entities that we connect with to the point that we actually
17 ordered supplies and will be delivering them to those
18 nonpublic schools. And that was all taken care of in that
19 grant process because it was a requirement and the
20 nonpublics had to sign off on the grant. So that mechanism
21 in and of itself should have fostered conversations amongst
22 districts across Pennsylvania.

23 REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: And thank you for
24 that. And I bring it up. I just think it's imperative that
25 we're including all students as we go through this very

1 challenging process.

2 Thank you.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
4 Representative.

5 Representative Jones.

6 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Thank you, Mr.
7 Chairman. I really appreciate you having this hearing,
8 extremely valuable.

9 And thank you to all of our panelists. I
10 don't think any of us envy any of you, very tough times,
11 tough decisions.

12 I have a variety of questions, but I'll try
13 to keep them all brief. In one or two cases I might just
14 make a statement only for the sake of time. There's a
15 couple of things I just want to get on your radar. They
16 don't necessarily require a response.

17 But having been a school board member up
18 until the end of, up until last fall, and parents obviously
19 like many of us with students and a brother that teaches
20 kindergarten in public school, I've got a little bit of
21 interest and a little bit of knowledge here.

22 Mr. Askey, I just want to get clarification
23 on two things relative to PSEA's position. There is a
24 movement affront called "14 days No New Cases" where
25 teachers and others -- certainly I don't think it represents

1 the majority by any stretch, but it's not an insignificant
2 number. I think I've received 30 or so e-mails -- are
3 advocating that we do not open schools until, I believe it's
4 a county, would have no cases at all for 14 days.

5 Does PSEA support this position or not?

6 MR. ASKEY: Neither PSEA or NEA does, sir.

7 We understand that that's probably a goal
8 that can't be achieved because the virus is here for a
9 while, to be honest with you. So we're just focused on
10 opening schools safely, whether it's hybrid, in-person, and
11 making sure that all the appropriate protocols are in
12 buildings to make them safe should face-to-face instruction
13 go on.

14 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Thank you.

15 I assumed or was hoping that was the case. I
16 wanted to give you a chance to go on record.

17 Like in a similar vein, if a teacher simply
18 feels uncomfortable about returning to work, no extenuating
19 circumstances other than they simply do not feel comfortable
20 doing it, is it your position that that teacher should be
21 allowed to remain home and their job should be retained for
22 them or do they have an obligation to report to work like
23 most everybody else in the state?

24 MR. ASKEY: Well, what we have done -- and
25 I've gotten messages from some of our members that have that

1 concern -- we refer them to, back to their local
2 Representative to have discussions to see if arrangements
3 can be made, but contracts are contracts. And they have to
4 be followed. So it's a difficult place.

5 And I can't tell you how many e-mails a day I
6 get from members that are filled with anxiety and stress,
7 even though they want to return. So I think we just have to
8 give everybody the space they deserve and have a discussion
9 with them about it.

10 But we do not have a position that if you
11 don't want to go back, you don't have to go back.

12 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Thank you. I
13 appreciate that and I recognize it's a tough situation.

14 I do want to say quickly, I do support some
15 extra sick time if it's driven by quarantine if people are
16 being mandated to stay home. I have no issue with that,
17 personally.

18 Mr. Sampson, I just want to be clear -- first
19 of all, I want to thank you for the numbers you shared.
20 It's the first that I've heard at least, the projections on
21 lost revenue at the local level.

22 I believe one of my colleagues mentioned that
23 that might be tied to funding for charter cyber. That
24 wasn't how I interpreted what you said. I believe you said
25 you were projecting a total of 700- to 800-million-dollar

1 shortfall, but I think that was largely, I think you said
2 450 to 500 based on property tax loss and another quarter of
3 a million, a little bit more, maybe 300 million, on other
4 local financial loss, which I think would mean some of the
5 income tax and maybe some other, you mentioned food and so
6 forth.

7 So I just wanted to make sure you clarified
8 for the record that that was the revenue loss that you were
9 speaking of. And secondarily, I believe in total, when you
10 look at state funding and local taxes and so forth, we spend
11 about 30 billion or so in public education in Pennsylvania.
12 So while 700 to 800 million is by no means a trivial number,
13 it corresponds to about two and a half percent on average of
14 a given district's budget.

15 Am I correct in those statements?

16 MR. SAMPSON: Yeah, you are. Thank you for
17 letting me clarify that.

18 In the written testimony there are some
19 numbers in regards to potential cyber tuition increases, but
20 to clarify, the numbers referred to in my verbal testimony
21 were about 450 to 500 in regards to various lost taxes that
22 the IFO projected. PASBO then projected an additional loss
23 of 260 to 290 in regards to realty transfer tax and
24 declining investment income to a total revenue loss of at
25 least 700 to 800 million statewide.

1 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Thank you. I
2 appreciate that.

3 And I think that's just a harsh reality of
4 all of the businesses (inaudible) in the last five or six
5 months. But somebody has got to pay (inaudible) a year
6 short on revenue. And I would suggest that while it's
7 certainly a hardship for schools, it pales in comparison to
8 what a lot of businesses have had to deal with. And this is
9 the real world. When you have a crisis and people aren't
10 working, you lose money. When you lose money, you've got to
11 cut costs. That's the way it works.

12 You had mentioned, Mr. Sampson, Act 13,
13 potentially extending that for the coming school year. I
14 might agree with some aspects of that relative to regulatory
15 and so forth. But I hope I have my facts straight. I
16 believe Act 13, I'm going from memory and I got a little bit
17 of a (inaudible) also (inaudible) funding for cyber charter
18 schools for any students that enrolled the last couple of
19 months of the previous school year; is that correct? And if
20 so, I would assume you would not suggest that we would
21 extend that policy through the entire upcoming year. We
22 could debate the funding formula. That's not my point, but
23 I certainly hope you're in agreement that the cyber charters
24 should be reimbursed for whatever students choose to enroll
25 with them; is that fair?

1 MR. SAMPSON: Yeah. I think that's a fair
2 statement.

3 The Act 13, I believe you're correct, limited
4 the enrollment after that March 13th date. But, no, we
5 fully understand new enrollments have to be reimbursed. As
6 you said, we can disagree on the process, but absolutely,
7 they have to be reimbursed.

8 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Thank you. Appreciate
9 it.

10 MR. SAMPSON: You're welcome.

11 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: Dr. Hotchkiss, if
12 we're in the weeds, we can table this, but you had talked
13 about flexibility in staffing, couldn't agree with you more.

14 My question is, could we, for the sake of
15 simplicity, could we simply say that any certified teacher
16 in the state of Pennsylvania could teach any grade level and
17 assume (inaudible), you know, not assign a kindergarten
18 teacher to teach physics if they're not qualified or to
19 teach shop or something? But do we need to get into the
20 weeds on that or can we just say, "If you're certified,
21 you're certified," and assume that at the local level, they
22 can make reasonable staffing allocations?

23 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yeah, I mean, that stance
24 would certainly provide the greatest flexibility. And I
25 think it, you know, it's up to all of us. We certainly want

1 to set people up for success. And we would, you know, to
2 your point, locally, we would make those determinations.
3 But that would provide us the greatest flexibility. And
4 then on a case-by-case basis we can work with our staff to
5 where they're comfortable, what their capabilities are, and
6 what their skills and talents are, no doubt.

7 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: (Inaudible) so I
8 appreciate that.

9 And then, I guess this is just a quick series
10 of things, because I don't want to abuse my time here. A
11 couple of things I just want to get on your radar, a couple
12 of others, if a couple of you want to comment on one or two
13 of them, that's fine. These probably go towards
14 Mr. Hotchkiss (inaudible).

15 Mr. Askey, you had talked about
16 (inaudible) -- about an unreachable position. With that
17 said, one of my big concerns is that, you know,
18 epidemiologists and similar have a role to play here, but I
19 think there's a huge role for child psychologists to play,
20 as well, and social workers and those types. And I hope
21 we're bringing them to the table.

22 So for example, when we talk about masks, I
23 would think there's a big difference potentially -- you
24 know, it may be very reasonable to ask a high school student
25 to wear a mask all day. I think at the elementary level --

1 I mentioned my brother is a kindergarten teacher, and he's a
2 very good one by all accounts -- I think being able to see
3 this (inaudible) that it has on kids, especially kids
4 entering in the -- you know, first couple of (inaudible) --
5 we want that to be a very good experience for school.

6 There's a lot of psychology with the doctors
7 I've talked to (inaudible) and I think -- so I would just
8 suggest that either by age level, we really need to look at
9 those policies differently. There's a big difference,
10 obviously, between a five-year-old and an 18-year-old.

11 And I think some of the classes, like gym
12 class (inaudible) -- necessary in a crisis. Do we need kids
13 clustered together, but do they need to wear a masks when
14 they're physically exerting themselves? I just think we
15 need to be a little more sophisticated on that. I'll table
16 that for a second. You can comment or just leave it at
17 that.

18 But those are the things that come to mind,
19 like group projects and so forth. I think there's
20 (inaudible) -- stability here, common sense on (inaudible).
21 And you know, maybe it's when you're close together, you
22 wear a mask and further apart maybe it's a little different.
23 I don't know.

24 But the other thing I want to say, when it
25 comes to distance, that's a huge -- one of the speakers

1 alluded to that. For some schools that may not be a big
2 deal. For others, that's a deal breaker.

3 I think we should -- are you looking at the
4 options for, like, physical barriers? So, I mean, arguably,
5 I'd rather be, you know, two or three feet away from
6 somebody with a piece of plexiglass between us than five or
7 six feet away without. And so I just think we need --
8 there's creative solutions here that shouldn't be
9 one-size-fits-all. So I think this (inaudible) -- I think
10 masks and so forth need to be balanced with age group and
11 the activity. You know, I don't know if it is or isn't safe
12 to run a piece of shop equipment, for example, with a mask.

13 And the last thing, and I do kind of want
14 some comment here. I saw a product used in a restaurant --
15 and I know I'm in the weeds, but I think it's potentially a
16 game changer. And I just want to say that we keep talking
17 about masks, I'm not so sure that clear face shields -- and
18 I've seen some hybrids where it's a mask, but it's a clear
19 plastic. I'm happy to send that to any of you that are
20 interested.

21 And I think it's very, very important here.
22 It's important for bartenders, for example, that people see
23 their expressions. It's extremely important for children --
24 I'll go back to my brother teaching kindergarten, for him to
25 be able to read their facial expressions and for them to be

1 able to read his. So I hope we're looking at face shields
2 and/or clear plastic hybrids and -- because I think that's
3 just hugely important, the whole --

4 And I hope we're involving psychologists and
5 social workers, not just, you know, epidemiologist types.
6 There's a place for them, but I think the psychology here is
7 huge. So if you want to leave it at that, that's fine. If
8 one or two of you want to make a quick comment, that's fine,
9 too.

10 And lastly, schools are where a vast, a large
11 portion of child abuse is reported. I just want to get that
12 on the record. We need to get these kids in school.

13 My heart breaks for these kids that are stuck
14 at home with abusers, any of whom -- they're being exposed
15 to them for extended periods of time, many of whom have a
16 higher likelihood of being unemployed and in a foul mood.
17 And there is a consequence to not being in school, as well,
18 and there are a lot of children that are suffering and their
19 lives are being devastated because they're stuck in some
20 really bad situations at home.

21 So I appreciate you tolerating my questions.
22 Again, you can just leave those for the record or if you
23 want to comment on the psychological piece and the shield
24 versus masks, I'm a little curious about that.

25 Thank you.

1 MR. SAMPSON: I can comment in regards to
2 Titusville School District. Our teachers will have shields
3 and masks available to them.

4 DR. HOTCHKISS: We will, as well, and we also
5 have them available for students.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Okay. Thank you,
7 Representative, for those questions.

8 REPRESENTATIVE JONES: I appreciate it.
9 Thank you very much.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: And the next
11 question will come from Chairman Roebuck.

12 See if we can get him unmuted here.

13 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: It says "mute,"
14 now it says --

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: You're on. We can
16 hear you.

17 You shut it back off.

18 STAFF MEMBER: I can mute him; I can't unmute
19 him, so he's going to have to do that.

20 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: (Inaudible.)

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: I can hear you
22 now.

23 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: (Inaudible.)

24 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: We can hear you.

25 Nope. You're muted again.

1 STAFF MEMBER: He's muted. I can't --

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: You're muted
3 again, Chairman. You're muted.

4 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: I'm (inaudible)
5 on my machine somewhere along here I'm getting muted.

6 So I'm muted now?

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Well, you keep
8 coming in and out.

9 STAFF MEMBER: His mic is muting and unmuting
10 randomly.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: You have a faulty
12 computer, apparently. Your mic just continues to mute and
13 then unmute and then mute and then unmute.

14 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Hello?

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: We heard that.
16 We cannot hear you, Mr. Chairman.

17 STAFF MEMBER: Send in a written question
18 maybe?

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: If you could,
20 write it and send it in, we'll ask it for you.

21 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: That's all right.
22 I'll just skip the question I had -- (inaudible).

23 STAFF MEMBER: There's something going on
24 with his computer, it has to be.

25 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: That's not going

1 to work.

2 STAFF MEMBER: I don't believe he's doing it,
3 but it's happening.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: No.

5 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: (Inaudible.)

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: We believe you
7 have an issue with your computer because it continues to
8 mute and unmute.

9 (No response.)

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Well, I'm sorry,
11 Mr. Chairman, but we tried.

12 Representative Gillen.

13 REPRESENTATIVE GILLEN: Thank you very much,
14 Mr. Chairman.

15 And thank you to our distinguished
16 presenters.

17 And thank you to the staff for pulling this
18 all together.

19 I don't have a lot of notes, and I'll be done
20 in just a minute or so.

21 I've been reading through the local newspaper
22 and I wasn't surprised to read that a school district that I
23 represent, that I live very close to, is planning on opening
24 school virtually. An adjacent school district -- they're
25 both suburban school districts -- is going to fully reopen.

1 And still another school district -- all three of them are
2 adjacent to one another -- had planned on a full reopening,
3 but is going to be opening virtually.

4 I think there was as many questions that rose
5 out of this exceptional hearing as there were answers. And
6 I'm hoping that moving forward, after we experience school
7 for the next couple of months, that we could reconvene,
8 collaborate, come up with some best practices, umbrella some
9 ideas. And I don't know if this group would be available.
10 I don't know what the Education Committee's situation is
11 going to be.

12 But it seems likely to me that we're going to
13 have to get back together again and we're going to have to
14 make some decisions, perhaps legislatively, we're going to
15 have to look at some finance issues, staffing patterns.

16 I think it's likely -- and I don't want to be
17 prophetic on this. I think, likely we're going to have an
18 acute staffing shortage somewhere down the highway here.
19 And I think it's important that we bring the best ideas and
20 best practices into play. There's going to be a lot that
21 we're going to learn moving forward.

22 At this moment, there's significant numbers
23 of questions. There was excellent inquiry, and I think the
24 answers are going to be forthcoming as we get into September
25 and October.

1 And I just, very briefly, not directed at any
2 one presenter, what think thee on coming together again and
3 share the experience that we've had, looking at it in the
4 rearview mirror in September and October, and say, "How do
5 we move forward constructively and safely?"

6 MR. CALLAHAN: Representative, this is John
7 Callahan.

8 I think even -- I was on a radio show two
9 weeks ago and then two weeks before that, and the situation
10 continues to change on the ground, the guidance continues to
11 change. So, you know, that is a very interesting and good
12 idea to kind of -- this pandemic will continue to affect us
13 and change week by week, almost daily.

14 So even when I mention we have a survey, it's
15 only a survey of a brief section of time that I bet has
16 already changed. So continuing these discussions is very
17 valuable.

18 And I'm encouraging all of our members, and
19 even encouraging legislators, and I say school districts, to
20 connect constantly to keep this communication up, because it
21 is invaluable at this time for school districts to connect
22 with you and to connect with each other in order to get
23 through this.

24 MR. SAMPSON: Yeah. I would reiterate that.

25 We really appreciate the opportunity, meaning

1 PASBO, myself, our school district. I've learned things
2 here today. But I agree, almost as soon as we get off of
3 this, things have changed. So as much as we can come back
4 together, we would be more than glad to come back and meet
5 with you guys.

6 Thank you.

7 MR. ASKEY: And for PSEA we are available
8 24/7 to anybody, any of you on the Education Committee and
9 your colleagues, to have discussions. We will be happy to
10 sit in on any kind of meeting that you need or discussion
11 you need. But you don't have -- let me just tell you, you
12 don't have to wait for an official meeting. Any of you want
13 to reach out and have a question or discussion and get a
14 feeling, please, do so as soon as you need to.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GILLEN: Thank you, Rich.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
18 Representative.

19 Next will be Representative Schroeder.

20 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: Thank you, Mr.
21 Chairman.

22 Thank you for all of you being here today. I
23 guess this question is more directed to Mr. Callahan.

24 But as of now, do you know of any plan that
25 has been submitted to PDE that has been approved or

1 disapproved?

2 MR. CALLAHAN: Well, the plans themselves
3 have to be approved by your school board before they're
4 submitted.

5 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: Yes.

6 MR. CALLAHAN: So that's the primary approval
7 process. PDE is actually not approving or disapproving
8 those plans. They're just kind of the clearinghouse.

9 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: And have you
10 gotten any feedback from PDE, then?

11 MR. CALLAHAN: Not that I'm aware of.

12 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: About any plans --
13 okay.

14 And then, I guess, you know, being last, you
15 kind of have all the other questions answered that you were
16 going to go with.

17 So my last is a comment and a question at the
18 end.

19 So I think this really shows the connection
20 of all these issues dealing with COVID, how they connect.
21 So our current unemployment compensation situation is a
22 mess, to say it lightly. And I think knowing that we have
23 so many families that are depending on our local school
24 districts and those food distributions to have meals, I'm
25 going to put it out there, do you think that's sustainable

1 that we're doing these food collections? I'm, you know,
2 really thankful for all the teachers and staff, volunteers,
3 people that have helped put those on. But looking at
4 things, I don't know how sustainable that is with resources.

5 So if you would like to talk about that at
6 all...

7 MR. CALLAHAN: I admit that I'm not the
8 professional in this area. So I'm kind of maybe looking at
9 our business official.

10 Sorry, Shawn.

11 MR. SAMPSON: Sure -- no, that's fine.

12 So last year, meaning March, when we went and
13 closed schools, many schools were able to extend through
14 their National School Lunch Program or they called -- they
15 had an SSO program. Didn't matter which one you went to.
16 Basically, most of these reimbursements were through the
17 federal government, most of that money flowed through the
18 federal government. And it's a very significant portion of
19 those operations.

20 We just got some correspondence today that
21 would seem to indicate that these students who are virtual
22 or can't get into the building, can be fed, but it would
23 appear right now that, possibly, we have to feed them each
24 day -- and that's where we're talking about flexibility. It
25 may be more of a federal issue, but I think being able to

1 work through the people of PDE that work with the feds, that
2 we need to try to work with them and find a way that we can
3 either satellite distribution centers, or I know, our
4 teachers, aids, and administrators will be having contact
5 with these kids that are staying at home and we're hoping to
6 be able to deliver it.

7 I agree 100 percent. It's a need we have to
8 fill, not just from a food standpoint, it also gives us
9 contact with those kids. We get to see what's going on with
10 the kids, what's going on in the homes, and work with
11 parents. And it's very much needed and appreciated.

12 REPRESENTATIVE SCHROEDER: Okay. Thank you
13 very much.

14 That's it, Chairman. Thank you.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
16 Representative.

17 Representative Tobash. Just one moment,
18 we'll get you unmuted.

19 Representative Tobash, if you're there, could
20 you unmute yourself?

21 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Can you hear me now,
22 Mr. --

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Yes.

24 STAFF MEMBER: He's got to do it again.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Unmute yourself --

1 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Mr. Chairman?

2 STAFF MEMBER: Yes.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Yes.

4 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Okay. Thank you, Mr.
5 Chairman.

6 The testimony has been thoughtful. The
7 questions were extremely thoughtful, and clearly more
8 questions than answers at this point in time.

9 On one simple topic about PPE, one of the
10 testifiers mentioned that they were utilizing their
11 intermediate units to try to coordinate that, and it clearly
12 seems that there could be more collaboration and cooperation
13 in regard to many of the issues that we've discussed here.

14 Intermediate units are, they hold themselves
15 out as highly skilled, technology rich, agile providers of
16 cost-effective operational services, which seems to me that
17 we're in dire need of right now.

18 My question is, to the testifiers, how are
19 they being utilized? There's 29 of them. They go across
20 the spectrum from private to public to charter, and they
21 seem to be the entity that could cooperate and collaborate.
22 To what extent are they being utilized? And I think, you
23 know, more importantly, to what extent could we empower them
24 to be utilized through this crisis?

25 Thanks.

1 DR. HOTCHKISS: I'm the one who mentioned
2 about the RIU and the joint purchasing effort. So that is
3 definitely one way.

4 I know as superintendents, through the
5 pandemic from back to March, we met early on on a daily
6 basis, and those were all superintendents across the IU.
7 And now, we're meeting at least once a week to talk around a
8 variety of topics.

9 The IUs have also served as a hub for us on
10 training for staff, on remote services. RIU actually has
11 their own cyber program that districts can elect into, and
12 again, it's been a great resource for school entities. And
13 so they have been a group that really has tried to connect
14 all school districts within its footprint. And certainly,
15 it's a vehicle that we try to leverage to stay connected and
16 to try to solve whatever problems are in front of us. So
17 that will continue through this.

18 We had a good experience with the PPE.
19 Although, I will share with you, the pricing that we
20 received through the IU was definitely a little bit higher
21 than we were finding individually on the open market,
22 whether that was vendors, you know, not sure, you know,
23 again, trying to look at an opportunity, I'm not sure. That
24 was our experience. But again, it was a nice way for us to
25 touch base and at least have the availability of the

1 products that we needed.

2 MR. CALLAHAN: And, Representative, we've
3 been seeing that across the state ever since the pandemic
4 really kind of hit us in March, kind of those regional
5 discussions, whether it's through an IU or through their own
6 personal needs. But I've sat on many of those calls and
7 they are happening all across the state. IUs have been very
8 helpful in facilitating that.

9 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: It's kind of puzzling
10 that when you band together, you know, 20 or 30 school
11 districts, that you can't get better pricing than one
12 individual district. It surprises me that we can't be more
13 effective in that regard.

14 That's it, Mr. Chairman, from me.

15 Thank you very much.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
17 Representative.

18 We have one final follow-up question from
19 Representative Knowles.

20 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr.
21 Chairman.

22 Quick question and then a comment. The
23 question is very simple.

24 During yesterday's testimony, the cyber
25 school community had indicated that they had reached out to

1 public schools, as well as many of the private schools, you
2 know, helping them in terms of the online learning. And I
3 was somewhat shocked to hear that there were very few of
4 those schools that reached out to the cyber school
5 community.

6 Do any of you care to comment on that, as to
7 -- are they wrong? Have they reached out? And if they have
8 not, can you just give some kind of an explanation as to why
9 not?

10 DR. HOTCHKISS: I can share with you that
11 PASA did connect with the Public Charter Schools Association
12 back in early spring, it was in April. And we were holding
13 daily briefings as an organization. And at the PASA
14 briefing on April 17th, the executive director did share out
15 the Public Charter School Association's willingness to
16 support public schools in their planning.

17 And so I don't know exactly how many school
18 districts were represented there, other than there were
19 many. And that information was shared out and it was left
20 up to each individual district as to whether they wanted to
21 access that help.

22 MR. ASKEY: And, Representative, if I may,
23 PSEA, we represent cyber charter teachers. And we actually
24 have been having some online professional development where
25 our cyber charter members are assisting our members, you

1 know, right directly with each other. And that's been
2 successful. They've come in, they've helped our members
3 talk about it.

4 So we have a platform here in PSEA where we
5 are able to give that information directly to our members.

6 MR. SAMPSON: I can't directly speak for the
7 conversations PASBO had, but I can just speak for myself.
8 If anyone can offer help, let's talk.

9 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you.

10 Just a quick comment, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

11 During this entire -- and by the way, I would
12 -- Representative Ortitay had mentioned in terms of
13 essential, nonessential, I can't think of anything that
14 would be more essential, or at least as essential as so many
15 of the other things, and that is our teachers.

16 During this entire pandemic, my district
17 office has remained open, first by telephone and e-mail,
18 five weeks with appointments, and then another five weeks in
19 terms of walk-ins. We have done so because we are an
20 essential service, particularly during the pandemic.

21 And what I will tell you is that we
22 constantly get questions from people and we sometimes tell
23 them -- for example, what comes after green? Nobody seems
24 to know that. We get very frustrated with the questions
25 that go unanswered by the Department of Health and the

1 Administration. But what I would say to you is, what we
2 hear from our constituents is, "You mean to tell me that
3 we're into this thing for five months and you don't have
4 answers?" Very annoyed, very disappointed. And my advice
5 to the schools, to all 500 schools, public schools plus all
6 the other schools, is that they should all have some kind of
7 a plan in place in terms of what happens if a student tests
8 positive, what happens if a teacher tests positive. Because
9 if you don't have a plan in place, you can be prepared to
10 hear exactly what we're hearing, and that is, "What the hell
11 have you been doing for the last five months to prepare for
12 this?"

13 So, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.
14 And thank you all for testifying today.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
16 Representative.

17 Representative Miller has a follow-up
18 question.

19 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Thank you, Mr.
20 Chairman, and thank you again for the second opportunity.

21 I would agree with my good friend, teachers
22 are essential. So are the paraprofessionals and the PCAs
23 and everybody who makes or assists in that child's learning
24 in that day. There's no doubt about it.

25 And I also agree, and I would echo with him,

1 that there would be many questions, or there may still be
2 many questions, in relation to what has been going on over
3 the last couple of months or why aren't we as far as we
4 should be. I do think that is something that also applies
5 to this legislature, in my opinion, in relation to assisting
6 you and all that you represent in getting across that line.

7 The liability thing -- the question with the
8 issue with everybody making a plan for what happens if
9 somebody tests positive, I appreciate that thought, as well.
10 The challenge that continues to play, though, is that if we
11 are going into liability issues, then it really has to be a
12 standard that should be applied universally for any of that
13 to work, at least in my opinion.

14 Look, I wanted to wrap up with just a thought
15 on the finances.

16 Clearly this -- we have come together in a
17 bipartisan fashion to be sure that a flat level of funding
18 was secured or was going to be there for this coming school
19 year. We detailed over the last couple of hours today and
20 in the two-plus hours yesterday a series of possible costs
21 that would not otherwise have been incurred absent the COVID
22 crisis; whether it's the PPE, whether it's even dealing with
23 the stuff that we talked about today that aren't typically
24 done, meaning, what are we going to do with personnel who
25 don't have health care in the buildings? Should we be doing

1 something for workers' comp like we did for firefighters
2 where we do a presumption change for those essential
3 personnels in school; and what at all should we be doing in
4 relation to licensed medical professionals in each building?
5 Is that something that was testified yesterday, is that
6 something we should be prioritizing, and how should
7 Harrisburg be helping out?

8 Look, obviously, Harrisburg provides funding
9 as does obviously the localities. I just wanted to make a
10 reference -- and I have no idea to how -- I don't know how
11 legitimate this is, but I just wanted to ask. Is this
12 something that would be, that you guys are planning? How
13 serious do you take it? Any possibility that there may be
14 any stop in federal funding depending on how your individual
15 school districts open? And if there is any chance of that,
16 can you provide any insight as to the impact of any
17 suspension of federal aid during this school year?

18 MR. SAMPSON: I can take the first shot at
19 that.

20 Federal aid in our general fund budget, in
21 other words, educating students, makes up roughly five
22 percent of our budget. It's mostly Title 1, Title 2, Title
23 4, and some others. A suspension of that would really
24 impact our programs in regards to reading and math, mostly
25 from the K to eight standpoint. It would be extremely

1 impactful to us because we don't have the ability to make up
2 those funds. We would even have a difficult time finishing
3 the year out without those funds. So any delay or
4 suspension of payments would be significant.

5 It would also be -- and I keep going back to
6 food service because I think it's one of the things that
7 kind of goes under the radar. Our food service program is
8 probably 80 to 90 percent funded by federal aid. So any
9 suspension would be a very significant impact to our
10 educational system.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

12 And Representative Topper.

13 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Thank you, Mr.
14 Chairman. I appreciate the second go-around.

15 I just, as we talked about local control
16 earlier, I realized there is an issue on, probably many
17 constituents' minds, also probably has been on your radar,
18 too, particularly in the administration, the school boards,
19 and that's in regard to how each district is going to handle
20 extracurricular activities, whether it be athletics, whether
21 it be band. You know, these are concerns that parents have,
22 especially if, you know, their kid is in their final year
23 where they're looking for a possible college scholarship --
24 that is if colleges ever go back to doing any of those
25 things either.

1 If the PIAA, who has said their guidelines,
2 in terms of interscholastic sports for instance, they're
3 following simply, you know, the mandates from the
4 administration. If the administration and PIAA say, "Look,
5 you're able to have sporting events," or if the
6 administration says, "you know, you're able to figure out a
7 way to do a chorus concert if you can do it safely," are
8 there plans in place at the local level that you believe you
9 could hold these events safely? And if that is given to you
10 as something that you can do, do you feel you have plans
11 that -- whether it's allowing parents only, six feet apart
12 in a 5,000, you know, seat stadium that could be able to
13 accommodate it, what are the thoughts that you have had in
14 your districts in terms of extracurricular?

15 MR. CALLAHAN: Representative, there's been
16 extensive discussions at school districts about just this.
17 This is a very hot topic right now, as you probably know.

18 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: We're aware, that's
19 why I'm asking the question.

20 MR. CALLAHAN: And each school district -- I
21 mean, what has come down, really, if I was to boil down the
22 decision-making, is decision-making is going to have to be
23 on the local district at this stage. So you're seeing
24 districts handling it in very different ways. There's even
25 been a few districts who have canceled fall sports

1 completely.

2 So again, this definitely has been a local
3 decision in the many manners in which they have to proceed.
4 They also have to put together a plan and submit that to the
5 Department of Ed on these extra -- well, at least the
6 extracurriculars pertaining to sports. But there's a lot of
7 discussion also on chorus and band and how to handle those
8 issues, especially with the spread of COVID and some of the
9 research on singing, believe it or not.

10 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yeah. It's actually taken up
11 a lot of time this week. I know our local league is
12 gathering information from all participating school
13 districts. And I think you're seeing that around the
14 Commonwealth, where leagues are weighing in on what fall
15 sports will look like. And that's happening -- some of it
16 has already happened, I know that's happening today. And
17 for us, we're part of District 3, that information is going
18 to go to District 3.

19 I think as far as making accommodations, I'm
20 real proud that recently we were able to actually have a
21 graduation broken down into really small sections, adhering
22 to all of the guidelines, staying under that 250, you know,
23 gathering. I feel like we were able to put a lot of things
24 in place and it ended up being a great event.

25 And so, if we were in a situation where we

1 can have spectators and conduct events, we're going to do
2 everything we can to try to do so safely. Each sport is
3 kind of unique. You know, I don't know what that looks like
4 for cross country versus a stadium. But I know folks will
5 put in the effort to take a look at that.

6 As far as other extracurriculars, even, you
7 know, I think about our marching band that was putting forth
8 their preseason practice, so the question is, "Are they able
9 to travel to share their show?" And so my response is
10 "we're going to be creative. You've worked hard. We're
11 going to try to create an opportunity for you to showcase
12 your talents."

13 And so I feel like most school districts
14 recognize the importance that extracurriculars play, not
15 just athletics, you know, in doing what we're doing. And
16 so, you know, we'll be looking for opportunities to provide
17 that, you know, that chance to showcase whatever it be,
18 whether it be an athletic talent, art, music, whatever it
19 would be in a safe manner, should we be permitted to do so.

20 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Mr. Askey, have you
21 heard from your members who are choral directors, band
22 teachers? I mean, what are they looking at in terms of what
23 they can do to make sure -- I mean, look, some of these kids
24 could be looking at doing this as a career and not being
25 able to, you know, hone that craft in your last couple of

1 years of high school is probably not going to help that.

2 MR. ASKEY: Well, just for the record, I'm a
3 choral teacher.

4 And I have not really heard too much from our
5 members. I know they're working in their locals to figure
6 out, with their local leadership, their administration, to
7 figure out things just like what Shane talked about as far
8 as, like graduation events and everything. So everybody is
9 looking at things, trying to be as creative as possible to
10 give the students opportunities because we all know what a
11 difference that makes in every child's life. So it just
12 depends on the situation at the locals and the plans have to
13 be made there.

14 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Can I ask you
15 specifically, just as the choral teacher, as opposed to the
16 president of PSEA, what would be your feelings, what you'd
17 like to see happen in a choral classroom or a high school
18 musical, something like that? How would you be able as a
19 teacher to best --

20 MR. ASKEY: Okay. Well, I'm going to be
21 very, very honest with you because I've seen studies of what
22 happens in a choral group when you're singing, it's not
23 good. The spread of droplets is frightening in a choral
24 situation. I will tell you that.

25 So you would have to have the students -- I

1 wouldn't even be comfortable with six feet in a choral
2 situation, to be honest with you. You would have to really
3 have those students spread far out in order to do something
4 like that.

5 REPRESENTATIVE TOPPER: Thank you, Mr.
6 Chairman.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you,
8 Representative.

9 I think we finally got through all of the
10 questions. I'd like to again thank the panel for your
11 participation today. It was great information.

12 I can assure you that the Education
13 Committee, we all understand the challenges that you've been
14 facing throughout this summer. It was a very different
15 summer for all of us. And I know that you've put a lot of
16 effort into creating different plans in hopes of being able
17 to open up our schools, which is what all of us would like
18 to see. But of course, we want to make sure that it's done
19 in a safe manner and the students are always considered
20 first and number one.

21 You know, we hear from the same constituents
22 that you do on a daily basis, so we are hearing their
23 same concerns. And we know that you have been working to
24 address those in the best manner possible. So we realize
25 it's still a moving target. We are hopeful that, again, the

1 schools will open in the fall.

2 But one final question that I have is, if
3 they are not, how prepared are you for 100 percent virtual
4 learning?

5 (No response.)

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Does anybody want
7 to answer that one?

8 MR. ASKEY: Well, I will tell you that our
9 teachers, our members, have just been doing amazing things,
10 not only just in the spring, but over the summer with online
11 learning, professional development that's been provided by
12 the districts and provided by us. So I know that the
13 teachers that are in the classrooms and the support
14 professionals that support the classrooms, they are all busy
15 learning about new ways that they can best deliver
16 instruction to the students.

17 DR. HOTCHKISS: Yeah. Since the spring,
18 we've been preparing for full remote -- as far as, from a
19 content perspective, to, you know, build that out, to
20 certainly improve upon what the spring was like, and then
21 really put other infrastructures in place that we didn't
22 have.

23 To Rich's point, I'm super proud of our
24 staff, of our teachers. They've been working relentlessly
25 all summer long because they just want to do the best job

1 that they can.

2 And one of the challenges has been, you know,
3 they've kind of had a foot in many camps, full remote camp,
4 a hybrid camp, and everything in between, and trying to
5 prepare for that. And that's really been challenging.

6 So I do feel like many, many districts have
7 thought about their own infrastructure, and if you have to
8 go to remote, that we can flip the switch. We recognize
9 that we're not going to have the same flexibility or the
10 amount of time that we had in the spring to do that. And so
11 I feel like we're in a much, much better place. I think our
12 teachers are in a much, much better place and they're
13 continuing to learn and continuing to build out content.
14 And I've just, you know, been impressed with their
15 dedication to do the best that they can.

16 MR. CALLAHAN: And, Mr. Chairman, one of the
17 things I'll say is that one thing we know for certain is
18 that when we switched over in March, that was certainly an
19 emergency situation, and a lot of struggles with that, a lot
20 of challenges, so many.

21 From there on out, we have been planning to
22 go virtual if needed and a lot of school districts are ready
23 for that. So we are certainly better than we were, in a
24 situation better than we were in the situation we were in in
25 March. So I have got to say we're much better prepared.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you for
2 that.

3 MR. SAMPSON: And, Mr. Chairman, I would say
4 that we are ready. We also know we will continue to learn
5 and grow through this process. We know it's not going to be
6 easy. We don't change a ship or move a ship in three
7 months, six months, or a year. But our staff, our
8 administrators, teachers, core staff, they are 100 percent
9 behind whichever way we go and I'm confident that we will
10 provide a good education either way. And we hope to not
11 have to go there. We want to be back in school.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SONNEY: Thank you.

13 I think we all want our students back in
14 school.

15 Again, thank you for your testimony.

16 And this hearing is adjourned.

17 (The hearing concluded at 12:37 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me on the within proceedings, and that this copy is a correct transcript of the same.

Summer A Miller

Summer A. Miller, Court Reporter
Notary Public