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Good Afternoon Chairman Sooney, Chairman Martin and Members of the House Education Committee!

I represent 110 independent schools enrolling 40,000 students from Erie to Chester and Stroudsburg to Pittsburgh. Our schools are Jewish, Catholic, Quaker, Non-sectarian, Boarding, Day, single sex, coed, large as in 2,000+ students and small as in 45 students. Our schools are proud of their socioeconomic and racial diversity.

### **What has been the impact of this pandemic on our students?**

As we all know, schools are vital as places of socialization. Those of us who have had the privilege of overseeing students over time have had the joy of watching reticent or timid or handicapped or normal young people develop into comfortable social creatures through the benefit of the unwritten social curriculum of school.

#### Issues at School

- Virtual instruction and germ safety protocols (“can't touch,” “can't share,” “can't read facial cues”) have derailed this process leaving.
- In order to accommodate 6 feet of distancing, we have not had all high school students on campus together for one day.
- Breadth and Depth of curricular exploration has been diminished, core content intact.
- Fitness programs as well as interscholastic competitions have diminished; still too early to understand obesity or anorexic consequences should kids not have others around them to monitor and support
- Online education expects children to sit passively, read documents and watch videos that dull the learning experience.
- While technology is here and growing, educators are still learning on the fly. I do not know that enough safeguards are in place yet to protect children - from online predators, identity theft, etc.
- The sensory experience of wearing masks and not being able to be touched, trying to learn in less ideal sensory environments is stressful and fatiguing
- Teachers are more stressed, less able to provide instruction and support in ideal ways, and this impacts students' sense of well-being.
- Children with learning difficulties are less able to get the support they need, in the way in which they learn best, and they are the most vulnerable students - this feels bad to students who already struggle

- Play for younger children is restricted and bound by adult rules, less naturalistic, multi-age, and free
- Increased levels of stress and anxiety among our students resulted in the need for us to hire an additional counselor.
- physical distancing requirements. It is impossible to keep small children 6 ft apart, yet I am forced to keep my numbers low to meet this standard
- The stress and anxiety of a pandemic not only related to fears about illness and contamination, but also the constant transitions/changes and the uncertainty of when this will end.

### Issues at Home

- Altered daily eating and sleeping habits, among other things, could lead to an array of physical and mental health challenges. To think every family can maintain an appropriate balance for every member of their family while they're often burdened with work responsibilities is foolish.
- Many hear and experience the impact of financial worries - particularly hard for those who were already emotionally vulnerable or prone to anxiety.
- Strained family relations, partly because of adult stress and fatigue, partly because of the increased number of hours families are spending in close proximity.
- Children are finding it harder to establish developmentally appropriate separation from their parents.
- Some families have experienced loss and illness; others have had unrelated grief which is likely complicated by the global narrative about a deadly disease.
- Children watch adults struggle, argue, and act out their stress - families judge each other and personal choices more, kids pick up on this.
- Parents are less able to be involved in the school/community experience which leaves families disconnected and perhaps feeling less trusting of teacher feedback, which again impacts the team holding environment for the children.

### Issues of Socialization

- Without deliberate wellness interventions, lagging indicators such as self-injury and suicide will follow the already rising rates of depression. The next epidemic for children, not just teenagers, will be one of mental illness.
- Less opportunity for friendship, recreation, hobbies, and fun - we aren't taking breaks from our routines, such as going on vacation.

- Less opportunity for children to engage in outside activities that gave them a sense of achievement and self-worth (music/dance lessons and performances, sports, visual arts), especially as a counterpoint for those students who find academic learning hard.
- Increased screen time with not enough screen breaks, kids are less active because they don't get to be outside with friends, which is a natural motivator for exercise and screen breaks.
- Loss of important milestones, celebrations, and community events that bring added meaning to children's lives - ongoing disappointments.
- Children witness and metabolize the inequalities and injustices the pandemic has exacerbated.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you about the experience and concerns of our students.