

SAFE Schools

Safe•Accountable•Forward•Equitable



Dear Governor Carney, Secretary Bunting, and Director Rattay:

We have all witnessed over the past 7 months how disproportionately COVID-19 has impacted communities of color. In Delaware, Hispanic populations have contracted the virus at **four times** the rate of white individuals, and African American populations at **two times** the rate. Last spring the Delaware DOE put out recommendations about how to spend CARES funding to support our highest needs students, but families at the most disproportionately affected schools **have not seen the benefits of these recommendations, and many feel that their students are not being served by the remote learning option.** For example, many students are still waiting for devices on backorder and experiencing sporadic internet access. Evictions and foreclosures will soon resume and utilities will be shut off, creating non-existent learning environments.

This leads us to the fact that lower income families and communities of color will feel disproportionately pressured to send their children back to school. For example, Red Clay's Roadmap to Reopening expressly states that the in-person option is best for "Families who do not have the flexibility/resources needed to support online learning at home". We know this will be true across the state, so we know that again, communities of color will be more impacted by COVID-19 when students begin in-person instruction. The broader impact leads to more exposure for educators, who are, according to surveys, overwhelmingly reticent to return without testing and tracing implemented weekly in the schools.

S.A.F.E. Schools campaign is named after our goals: to achieve Safe, Accountable, Forward, and Equitable Schools for Delaware's most vulnerable students. At this moment, in the midst of a global pandemic, those students are not being properly protected. Schools are split amongst 19 different districts and 23 charter schools. Delaware DOE has only issued recommendations—**not requirements**— on how districts should safely re-open, thus creating inequitable outcomes from one community to the next. Our students, their families, and school teams deserve to be protected from exposure to COVID-19 to the best

of our ability. We believe it is the Executive Branch's responsibility to enact protective measures: universal testing in schools is a necessary component.

There are two successful initiatives currently underway in Delaware that could be replicated across the state.

- **Delaware State University** has partnered with the nonprofit Testing for America to prove that frequent testing is the best tool we have to protect our students and keep schools open. Currently, DSU's entire population has a <1% positive case rate; 99% of the positive cases have been asymptomatic and **would not have been caught without testing**¹.
- **Eastside Charter School** has adopted a robust testing and tracing system, testing everyone in the building each week, and enabling them to stay safely open since September 16 with zero positive cases.

On the other hand, we see a troubling trajectory starting with the shut-down of Woodbridge High School, where testing is only recommended. Despite the fact that the school has followed strict cleaning, social distancing, and hygiene protocols, they were not able to control the spread of COVID-19 without resorting to closing their doors again.

Delaware has done a remarkable job providing testing for the community. Now we are asking that our school communities be protected by extending our testing capabilities into school buildings. We see that communities of color and their educators are most at risk, and we see what can be done to best protect them. If we as a state don't implement testing and contact tracing to protect our school communities from the spread of COVID-19, we need to ask the question: why not?

S.A.F.E. Schools and our community partners are requesting that Governor Carney issue a statewide mandate requiring the implementation of a standard testing and contact tracing protocol in every Delaware school. Necessary funding must come from the state and county level to avoid putting excess strain on individual schools and districts. The Delaware Department of Education should provide support and oversight to ensure full compliance. The safety of our children and educators demand nothing less during this unprecedented time.

Respectfully,

¹ [Testing for America](#) presentation, October 2020

S.A.F.E Schools, in partnership with:

Building People Power
Network Delaware
Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League
ACLU Delaware

and

Representative Chukwuocha
Senator Lockman
Representative Brady
Representative Williams
Senator Sturgeon
Representative Longhurst
Senator Ennis
Senator Sokola
Matt Meyer
Sarah McBride
Shané Darby
Delaware CAN
First State Educate
Wilmington Center for Education Equity and Policy
Pathways to Success
H&S Impact Group
Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow
Safe Communities Delaware
Delaware Center for Justice
Black Mothers in Power
Ascending Generations