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Pennsylvania House Education Committee
Public Hearing: Safely Reopening Schools in the Fall
June 17, 2020

Testimony of the
Pennsylvania Public Cyber Charter School Association (PCCSA)

Thank you Chairman Sonney, Chairman Roebuck, and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee. We are grateful for the opportunity to address this Committee regarding safely reopening our schools in the fall of 2020. Pennsylvania's Public Cyber Charter School Association (PCCSA) is committed to providing each of our students with a safe, supportive, and high quality cyber educational experience from the very first day of the 2020-2021 school year.

PCCSA represents a select group of Pennsylvania's public cyber charter schools who are dedicated to collaboration and sharing best practices in online education with the larger public school community. As a group, PCCSA educates over 10,500 of Pennsylvania's public school students from nearly every county. As such, ensuring that all students have equal and equitable access to all supports and resources during the current COVID-19 pandemic remains a challenge. One that PCCSA readily accepts. As a collaborative entity, PCCSA is confident that given the dedication of our faculty and staff, combined with our 20 years of experience, we will be ready to support each and every one of our students.

Nearly every school in the Commonwealth was effected by the educational upheaval that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent school closure notification. Yet, PCCSA's member schools and their students did not miss a day. Each PCCSA school was able to develop and implement a Continuity of Education plan that was consistent with the expectations of their parents and students and which met the Department of Education's guidelines. Further, PCCSA member schools sought out opportunities to collaborate with our colleagues in brick and mortar schools to share best practices in online education to ensure no student's educational opportunities would be impeded.

In addition, despite the school closure notification on March 13th, PCCSA member schools continued to enroll students despite not being reimbursed for the students we educated. PCCSA considered it a moral imperative to ensure that all students had access to a high quality continuity of education that every Pennsylvania student deserves. In the weeks following the school closure announcement, the Department of Education agreed with our stance and encouraged all schools to continue to enroll students whose parents sought the best educational opportunities despite the pandemic.

PCCSA recognizes that as long as cases of COVID-19 remain within the commonwealth and surrounding states, there are no strategies that completely eliminate the risk of transmission. As we begin to reopen schools and resume school activities, our goal is to diminish the opportunity for the novel coronavirus to spread. With this in mind, all school activities will be guided by Governor Wolf's Process to Reopen Pennsylvania.

Each PCCSA member school is in the process of creating a Health and Safety Plan that will guide both instructional and non-instructional school activities. Each respective Health and Safety Plan will be

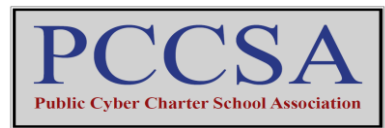
tailored specifically to the individual school, consistent with the expectations of the families they serve, and informed by each school's unique mission and charter. The Health and Safety Plans will also include an emphasis on professional learning and promote transparent communications with families, faculty and staff. Following the approval of each school's governing board, the Health and Safety plans will be made public through each school's respective website. Understanding the dynamic nature of this pandemic, each plan will remain adaptable to the variety of conditions that may fluctuate throughout the state.

As part of the Health and Safety Plan, each PCCSA member school is in the process of identifying either a pandemic coordinator or a pandemic team who will have clearly defined roles and responsibilities as they relate to health and safety preparedness and the reopening of their respective schools. The pandemic coordinator or team will facilitate the planning process; monitor the implementation of the respective Health and Safety Plan; review local, regional, and statewide health data; assess the effectiveness of the Health and Safety Plan; and provide recommendations for adapting the Health and Safety Plan to fluctuating conditions throughout the year. Each pandemic coordinator or team will also seek to be informed by the diversity of the populations they serve.

Already, each PCCSA member school has taken steps to ensure the sanitization of all school buildings consistent with CDC recommended guidelines. These efforts remain ongoing. In addition, essential staff who must utilize the school facilities in order to maintain vital school activities have been identified and properly trained on all safety procedures and precautions. Essential employees have also been provided with recommended personal protective equipment including protective masks, hand washing stations, disinfecting wipes, and hand sanitizer. As the summer progresses, we will continue to evaluate the necessity of bringing additional faculty and staff within the school buildings as well as evaluate additional protective measures that could be explored including maintaining social distancing guidelines, strategic work spaces, and physical barrier separations. It is our goal that as we move toward the fall, we will have evidence and best practice guidelines for ensuring the safe resumption of any face to face student activities within our facilities.

Providing related services to our special education population will continue to present challenges throughout the school year. While the vast majority of special education services are able to be provided within the online learning environment, specific evaluation services require a more consistent and structured environment in order to ensure the fidelity of the assessment. As such, discussions remain ongoing regarding the utilization of CARES Act funding to support the safe sanitization of facilities across the commonwealth.

As we move toward the fall, PCCSA will continue to collaborate with the Department of Education, the Department of Health, our own Pupil Health and Student Support Services, as well as our dedicated faculty and staff to ensure the health and safety of our students. We recognize that there are many challenges and logistical hurdles that must be addressed to ensure the safe re-opening of our schools. And, we are confident that we will address each area of concern in a manner consistent with all CDC and state recommended guidelines.



Thank you again, Chairman Sonney, Chairman Roebuck, and the Honorable members of the House Education Committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the safe reopening of our schools in the fall.

It is our hope that through open communication and collaboration with our colleagues in both cyber and brick and mortar schools across Pennsylvania, we will continue to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for every student within the commonwealth. Please know that the member schools of PCCSA remain available to the members of this committee for ongoing dialogue and consultation as we seek to advance educational opportunities for all students.