

**William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.**  
Superintendent

July 28, 2020

Dear School District of Philadelphia Parents and Families,

On July 15, we announced our *Advancing Education Safely* plan for school opening which prioritized health and safety, a mix of in-person and digital learning for all students, and using feedback from our school communities to inform our decision making. We have since heard from many families and educators who are uneasy with the plan. We have also heard from many others who are in favor of it.

I believe it's important to listen. And it's important to have your trust and support as we all try to create a plan that will help our children learn in an environment we have never experienced.

After careful consideration of all of the feedback we have received, we are now proposing that we start the school year with all students learning remotely for the first marking period (through November 17th). Students would then transition to the hybrid learning model as long as guidance from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and other indicators support it is still safe to do so.

The information at the bottom of this letter summarizes the proposed changes. These changes were not made lightly. All of the decisions we are making due to the COVID-19 pandemic are difficult ones with no obvious answers for how to account for the many, and often competing, needs of our students, staff and families. We continue to thoughtfully weigh our fundamental responsibility to meet the many educational needs of our students while also supporting everyone's safety and well-being and considering all of the input and feedback we've received at Board meetings and through surveys, town halls and online.

We are sharing this revised plan for Board consideration at its 4 p.m. meeting on Thursday, July 30. If you want to share feedback on the proposed changes, please use the Give Feedback button at [philasd.org/schoolstart2020](https://philasd.org/schoolstart2020). You can view a live stream of the meeting on the District's webpage [here](#). If approved, implementation of the revised plan would begin immediately.

I will keep you updated as additional information and decisions are made. Thank you for your engagement and patience as we pursue a reopening plan that advances education safely for all.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite Jr., Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
The School District of Philadelphia

### **Highlights of changes to the School Year 2020-2021: *Advancing Education Safely Plan*:**

➤ **First Day of School for Students**

The revised plan reflects Wednesday, September 2nd, as the first day of school for the 2020-2021 school year (*pending Board approval of the revised academic calendar when it meets on July 30th*). This extra time before students start school allows us to support teachers with more professional development that would expand and deepen their skills to provide engaging digital instruction for students.

➤ **Mental Health, Trauma and Social-Emotional Supports**

Our students and staff have been through a lot in the wake of this pandemic and other traumas. Even as we begin the year with all digital learning, we will work with trusted local partners and national experts to launch *Healing Together* -- an initiative to help meet our students' and staff's mental health, trauma and social-emotional needs before traditional learning begins.

➤ **Digital Learning with Classroom Teachers**

All K-12 students would engage in digital learning five days per week and receive instruction from teachers in their enrolled school. We will not be moving forward with the Digital Academy as previously proposed. For the hybrid model, we will continue to evaluate digital opportunities that prioritize students being taught by teachers in their enrolled school.

➤ **Chromebooks & Internet Access**

Chromebooks will be provided to any student who needs one for digital learning. We are working on options to make additional Chromebook distribution as convenient as possible for students and families, and will share that information when available. City leaders are also working with numerous local internet companies to provide reliable internet access to all Philadelphia students who need it for the start of school and throughout the school year.

➤ **Meals for Students**

Meals for students will be provided while the digital learning model is in place. It will look much like our summer meal distribution process with various pickup locations available throughout the City. Specific details will be shared in August.

➤ **Facility Improvements**

Starting with all digital learning for the first marking period also gives us more time to expand the scope of facilities improvements we are making in our schools.