



# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Philadelphia, PA 19107

CHERYL BETTIGOLE, MD, MPH  
Health Commissioner

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Dear School-based Colleagues,

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health supports the decision by the School District of Philadelphia to keep schools open for in-person learning and strongly encourages all K-12 schools in Philadelphia to do so whenever possible. While individual classrooms, grades, or schools may need to temporarily pause in-person learning if cases in those groups are high, we do not advocate closing schools broadly at this time despite the current COVID surge. There are several reasons for this recommendation:

- We have seen serious consequences for children and families of a prolonged pause of in-person learning including loss of educational opportunity as well as serious impacts on mental health and increased risk of other negative health consequences.
- Of COVID cases among students and staff at schools in Philadelphia, only a small fraction resulted from in-school spread. School settings are much more structured making it easier to have children remain masked than while in other types of settings. Therefore, we would not expect a change to hybrid education to result in lower rates of COVID among children or staff.
- Given the current surge, the upcoming holidays and cold weather, cases in Philadelphia and across the nation could be high for weeks or months. We should not expect a 1-2 week pause to have an impact.
- Because of nationwide supply chain problems, it is unlikely that schools would be able to implement testing prior to a return to school in January.

This is an evolving situation, and we must all be flexible and understanding that plans can change quickly. However, a prolonged pause of in-person learning could have a profound impact on children and families. **For these reasons and more, we are strongly supportive of school leaders maintaining in-person learning with appropriate mitigation measures such as consistent masking, isolation and contact tracing, and are committed to doing what we can to support their work.**

If you have any questions, please reach out to our team at [COVID@Phila.gov](mailto:COVID@Phila.gov). Many thanks for all you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Bettigole'.

Cheryl Bettigole, MD, MPH  
Health Commissioner

