

July 17, 2020

## **Reopening Duval County Public Schools Must Meet Public Health Safety Criteria**

**JACKSONVILLE, FL** With respect to Covid-19, there are no right or wrong answers—only informed answers. Opening schools will not happen in isolation, but in the context of a public health system that must be fully prepared to prevent disease spread.

We are in a surge of infection that may soon resemble South Florida—decisions today must consider this perspective. Schools should not reopen until at least the following criteria are met:

- The epidemiology of the disease is clearly monitored and transparently reported by risk status, including race, demographics, geography, etc.
- Enforced regional requirements for masks, distancing and gathering size are in place. Requirements consider new information that COVID-19 can spread by small airborne droplets.
- Easy access to testing with 24-hour turnaround is available. DCPS should consider developing its own capacity for testing the 150,000+ people for whom it is responsible.
- Effective contact tracing integrated with rapid testing is implemented with databases able to ensure its effectiveness.
- Sufficient numbers of trained/experienced nurses are in schools.
- Testing for individuals at risk of spreading the disease in schools is mandated.
- Evidence-based protocols are published that define responses to the identification of SARS-CoV-2 in classrooms, including requirements for testing and contact tracing.
- Autonomous, transparent communication provided by experienced public health professionals is assured.
- Messaging is coordinated among all community stakeholders in children's health, particularly pediatricians—emphasizing that although risks are lower, children can become infected with the disease and manifest severe symptoms, and also can spread the disease.
- Sustained funding is allocated to schools to ensure optimal protection, including requirements for capital improvements, supplies and hiring school nurses.

There will be spread of disease secondary to the school opening. Some children will be infected and hospitalized. Increased numbers of adults will follow the same path. Deaths will most likely occur due to school reopening.

Delaying opening until all public health systems are in place, and then moving to a hybrid model that evolves to a fully opened system, is a viable approach.

We have one chance to get this right. Focusing on public health safety in the short term will provide time to ensure all systems are in place to enable sustainable success in reopening our schools.