

August 21, 2020

Dear Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Infante-Green,

We hope that you and your families are doing well during this incredibly stressful and challenging time. We also understand and appreciate how important and difficult it is to be a leader in our state during this time. As Superintendents, AFT Presidents, and school community leaders, we feel it is very important that students and staff return to schools with their peers and colleagues. We miss our students and want a safe return to school for everyone. Our top priority is bringing back students and staff in an environment that is safe, inviting, and nurturing for all.

However, it has become clear over the last number of weeks that we may not be able to open schools in a way that keeps all our students, families, staff, and community members safe. The five (5) metrics that were shared state-wide solidifies this apprehension, and we have identified the following concerns in alignment with the reopening metrics.

1. **Statewide Readiness:** We are concerned about the recent increase in COVID-19 cases in RI. We have not seen a consistent decrease in many days/weeks.
2. **Municipal Readiness:** Many of the leaders in our group lead large districts that continue to experience high rates of COVID-19 cases.
3. **Testing Readiness:** The state initiative to expand testing is very important, and we are hoping for an increased availability of testing locally and a 48-hour turnaround on test results.
4. **Supply Readiness:** Financially, we are struggling with purchasing sufficient cleaning supplies, antibacterial soap, hand sanitizer, face coverings, and PPE for our students and staff. In addition, the lack of availability of these supplies is impacted by the large number of communities both statewide and nationwide, all trying to secure these same products needed to open schools safely. A sufficient supply is needed to last an indefinite amount of time, given that we do not know when the COVID-19 pandemic will end.
5. **Operational Readiness:** Although we all have scenario plans and are making revisions based on RIDE feedback, we have significant concerns about the ability to ensure safe air quality and environmental conditions within our schools, many of which cannot support the ventilation filtration standards. We also do not have the staffing to instruct students in both an in-school and distance learning model simultaneously. We need additional medical staff available to respond to COVID-19 related emergencies in the manner described in the RIDOH playbook. Additionally, we do not believe we can adequately staff the buildings to keep them clean and sanitized based on the required CDC standards. Transportation readiness and availability continues to be a major concern for all of us.

On Friday, August 7, 2020, the RIDE School Building Authority hosted a visit with Dr. Erin Bromage and more than 30 participants from schools and districts statewide. During this visit, Dr. Bromage, a highly qualified and respected scientist, shared an array of recommendations based on scientific evidence for safe classroom and school environments. He emphasized four areas of concern when reopening schools: ventilation, filtration, social distancing, and cleaning. Based on Dr. Bromage's four stated areas of concern, which are specific to the spread of

COVID-19, we are unable to safely open our buildings. We are not confident a delay will ameliorate these concerns.

We cannot continue to wait for directions that have a significant impact on our communities' finances, on our ability to plan solid instruction that addresses academic and social-emotional needs, and on our ability to maintain the health and safety of our staff and students. We have been charged with representing and protecting the members of our school communities. We would do a disservice to our educational communities if we did not advocate for them by making safe and responsible decisions. When statistics become people and faces of students and staff, none of us are willing to have one person experience undue suffering or distress.

Finally, we find it very difficult to plan for a scenario that will not be finalized until August 31, 2020. We understand that the RIDOH wants the most recent data available to make the decisions on school reopening, however, the reality of scheduling and planning for the return of thousands of students and staff to hundreds of schools requires more than 10 days' notice. It is our responsibility to keep the members of our school communities safe, and we need more direction from the state level as to which scenario will be implemented. In the absence of firm guidance, we feel it is our responsibility to notify our state leaders that if we, as the district leaders, do not feel that we can confidently and safely meet the metrics above, then schools in our communities will open in a virtual/distance learning environment.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter.

Coventry Superintendent-Craig Levis

Coventry President-Kelly Erinakes

Cranston Superintendent-Jeannine Nota-Masse

Cranston President-Liz Larkin

Johnston Superintendent-Bernie Dilullo

Johnston President-Kathy Kandzerski

Lincoln Superintendent-Lawrence Phillipelli

Lincoln President-Fred Hoppe

Pawtucket Superintendent-Cheryl McWilliams

Pawtucket President-Ron Beaupre

West Warwick Superintendent-Karen Tarasevich

West Warwick President-Sean Doyle

Warwick Superintendent-Phil Thornton

Warwick President-Darlene Netcoh

Woonsocket Superintendent-Patrick McGee

Woonsocket President-Robert Stewart

North Providence President-Michael Cicerone