



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Mark Johnson, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

WWW.DPI.NC.GOV

July 7, 2020

via email

Dear Governor Cooper:

Today's Council of State meeting ended before each Council of State member could share updates or concerns from their departments. I am concerned about inconsistent health guidelines issued by NC DHHS for reopening schools. I am writing with the hope that the science supporting new guidelines might be explained and to present a possible resolution to avoid unnecessary confusion at the local level.

The NC DHHS StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit provides the requirements under Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C for returning to schools in the fall. Initially, social distancing was required on school buses but revisions to Plan B (issued by NC DHHS on June 24) significantly reduced social distancing requirements on buses with no public explanation and no requirement for elementary school students to wear face coverings. Now, instead of one student every six feet in an enclosed school bus, there could be at least one child in every seat, putting students only one to two feet apart.

While I support efforts to overcome the challenges associated with transportation, this revision now places elementary students very close together for prolonged periods of time in enclosed spaces without face coverings. In the interest of greater transparency, I am requesting an explanation of the science that supports this significant change in policy. If science does not support this change, we should discuss the NC DHHS guidelines following the science and requiring face coverings on all school buses, not just for students in middle school or high school settings.

State Board Chairman Eric Davis and NC DHHS communicated on this matter with no input from the full State Board of Education or me, and that omission has resulted in a confusing and inconsistent policy. Your office, NC DHHS, the full State Board of Education, DPI, and I should all be included in any discussions of significant policy changes with the goal of working together to avoid inconsistencies in school reopening guidance and directives going forward.

I will continue to work with you and the State Board of Education in a bipartisan spirit during this crisis, but our work should be done in a clear, transparent manner. Our students, educators, parents, and communities deserve decisive, cooperative, and effective solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Johnson".

Mark Johnson
NC Superintendent of Public Instruction

c:

Council of State

State Board of Education