



Governor Tom Wolf  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Office of the Governor  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Secretary Noe Ortega  
Pennsylvania Department of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126

January 10, 2022

Governor Wolf and Secretary Ortega:

I am writing on behalf of the 36,000 educators, paraprofessionals, school staff, and state employees across the 64 locals of AFT Pennsylvania to follow up on the statement we released on Friday to media and have subsequently reiterated in print and television news interviews.

As we have repeatedly stated throughout the past two years of this pandemic, educators and other school staff want to be in classrooms; that is where they do their best work and can tend to the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. But this virus, especially the current surge, has made it nearly impossible to deliver the quality of education that they expect of themselves.

We are grateful for and encouraged by your administration's partnership with Concentric to offer COVID-19 testing services to K-12 schools across Pennsylvania at no cost to districts. However, we are dismayed by the relatively paltry number of schools that have opted into the program. Unless *every* school district in the Commonwealth is instituting uniform, or near-uniform COVID-19 mitigation layers, we will continue to see in-school and community spread.

Therefore, we have called for a two-week pause on in-person learning to buy time for more educators, staff, and students to be vaccinated, for schools to procure upgraded PPE (KF94/KN95/N95 masks) for educators, staff and students, and for schools to implement a more robust testing regime.

With the current surge in COVID-19 cases in the United States and here in Pennsylvania decimating the ability of any business or entity to provide services, we are alarmed by the laissez faire enforcement of COVID-19 mitigation strategies in school settings. Just in Philadelphia alone, 91 schools are virtual this week due to staff shortages caused by the

3031 Walton Road, Building A, Suite 340, Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462 | 215-587-6784

10 S. 19th Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15203 | 412-431-5900

600 N. Second Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101 | 717-238-9351

[www.aftpa.org](http://www.aftpa.org)  AFT Pennsylvania  @AFTPAUnion

An affiliate of American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO



Omicron variant, to say nothing of students testing positive or the other 498 districts in the Commonwealth.

Therefore, we are asking the Pennsylvania Department of Education to reinstate COVID mitigation layers in all school districts, rather than the current patchwork that exists. This includes negotiated vaccination mandates for educators and school staff, masking requirements with KN95 masks or greater, and asymptomatic and pool testing of students and staff regardless of vaccination status. If these layers of mitigation cannot be instituted in a timely manner, we believe there is no choice but to pause in-person learning for two school weeks.

As always, thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me or a member of our staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Arthur G. Steinberg'.

Arthur Steinberg  
President, AFT Pennsylvania