

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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July 10, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

As a follow up to my letter dated June 18, 2020, I write to encourage you to revise your guidelines for reopening Virginia schools this fall for five days a week of classroom for all students. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) agree—the greater risk to our children is keeping schools closed.

“... the AAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation. This, in turn, places children and adolescents at considerable risk of morbidity and, in some cases, mortality.”

It is clear from CDC and Virginia Department of Health data that COVID-19 is rarely contracted and transmitted by children. In addition, according to the AAP, “Beyond the educational and social impact of school closures, there has been substantial impact on food security and physical activity for children and families.” Certainly, the myriad benefits of being in the classroom outweigh the risk of bringing children back to school.

Once again, I urge you to set a date for the special session in August. There is great unrest in the Commonwealth caused by this pandemic. The sooner policy issues and other topics related to COVID-19 can be taken up by the General Assembly, the sooner confidence and security can be restored to our constituents. I look forward to working with my fellow legislators to enact legislation in the best interests of Virginia and its citizens.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill DeSteph".

Bill DeSteph