

August 6, 2020

Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia
Robert J. Harvie Jr.
Gene DiGirolamo
Members, Bucks County Commission
Bucks County Administration Building
55 East Court Street
Doylestown, PA 18901

David Damsker, M.D.
Director
Bucks County Health Department
Neshaminy Manor Center
Route 611 and Almshouse Road
Doylestown, PA 18901

Dear Commissioners Ellis-Marseglia, Harvie, and DiGirolamo, and Dr. Damsker:

On behalf of school employees, students, and families in Bucks County, I write to strongly urge you to amend the Bucks County Department of Health's school reopening guidelines to recommend that all students and staff maintain 6 feet of social distance in school buildings.

Bucks County's current guidelines, recommending 3 feet of social distance, are at odds with virtually every generally understood health guidance. Six feet of social distance is now the norm in Pennsylvania. To recommend anything less in school buildings will put students, teachers, support professionals, and their families at unnecessary risk of contracting COVID-19 and increase the likelihood that they will spread the virus to others.

In addition to the health risks that 3 feet of social distance will undoubtedly cause, your guidance has caused confusion in Bucks County's schools. This is certainly understandable, since the county guidance differs from recommendations issued by the state departments of Health and Education. The state has clearly recommended 6 feet of social distance in schools.

As PSEA president, I have repeatedly urged the commonwealth to issue clear directives, rather than suggestions, on this and other issues related to safely reopening schools for in-person instruction. One of the key reasons I continue to do this is because, without state directives, county governments like yours as well as many school districts are simply ignoring the state guidance and making their own rules.

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The members I represent in Bucks County want to teach and serve their students. Their commitment to the county's children is nothing short of extraordinary. But, where schools are returning to in-person instruction, they want to be certain that schools reopen in ways that reduce health risks.

A mere 3 feet of social distance just doesn't meet that standard. That's why the county guidelines must change to clearly recommend 6 feet of social distance.

It is simply shocking that 6 feet of social distance is the norm in restaurants, shops, public transportation, and other public spaces but that it isn't in Bucks County schools. To keep thousands of children and staff members safe, the social distance standards for public schools shouldn't be lower than the rules enforced in a coffee shop.

Arguments about the impracticality of enforcing this standard in schools don't justify it. As we all know from health experts, the coronavirus doesn't recognize borders, and it won't give us a pass just because keeping space between one another to slow its spread is too hard to do.

To reduce health risks, end the current confusion in Bucks County schools, and reduce anxiety for students, staff, and their families, I urge you to immediately change your school reopening guidance to require 6 feet of social distance in school buildings.

This is the right thing to do for public education in Bucks County. Please do it without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rich Askey', written in a cursive style.

Rich Askey