August 12, 2020

Cc: School ReOpening: The welfare of students is paramount

On this week, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children’s Hospital Association released a report, " Children and COVID 19," that states that there has currently been 380,174 total child COVID-19 cases reported since the beginning of the pandemic. There have been 179,990 new child cases reported from 7/9-8/6 (200,184 to 380,174), a 90% increase in child cases over the last 4 weeks. As of this time, children represent a minor percentage of cases, hospitalizations and deaths, but the rate is rapidly accelerating in Southern and Western states. Tennessee has an unusually high proportion of cases in children which stands at over 16%.

Likewise, the CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report concluded that Latix X (8 times) and Black children (5 times) more likely to have COVID 19 infection rates and hospitalizations. As a counter-effect , some health ailments like multisystem inflammatory syndrome compound these medical conditions. Systemic inequities such as abject poverty; environmental justice issues such as proximity to toxic brownfields, clean air and water systems; adequate healthcare; food deserts and healthy eating; chronic conditions like asthma; and density that hinders social distancing and isolation are all contributing factors for these disparity levels. These are all variables policy (-makers should consider prior to the physical reopening of schools in addition to other key indicators. Safety, security and sustainability of students should be the most prime directive we engage in at this time for nothing is more paramount than the welfare of our children. Many education groups across the nation are advocating for that basic fundamental right.

The Unity Group strongly supports the work and advocacy of the many educational groups who raised their collective voices in demanding the most safe and practical measures left available to us when considering the Reopening of schools. We echo the recommendations released from groups like the Schott Foundation and Journey4Justice alliance in saying that our schools should have equity or else. Recommendations from that August 3rd day of action and subsequent report includes:

* No reopening until the scientific data supports it
* Police-free schools
* All schools must be supported to function as community schools with adequate numbers of counselors and nurses and community/parent outreach workers
* Safe conditions including lower class sizes, PPE, cleaning, testing, and other key protocols Equitable access to online learning
* Support for our communities and families, including canceling rents and mortgages, a moratorium on evictions/foreclosures, providing direct cash assistance to those not able to work or who are unemployed, and other critical social needs
* Moratorium on new charter or voucher programs and standardized testing
* Massive infusion of federal money to support the reopening
* Equitable access to online learning.

It is incumbent upon this community to listen to medical professionals, science and data which should dictate or thinking processes. From the images we are seeing of school hallways where there is no social distancing and personal protective equipment is alarming. We are also highly concerned about the small cluster of outbreaks we have heard of across the region, from athletic teams to teachers who have contracted COVID-19. We should join the other major metropolitan regions in the State and delay Reopening until we see a downward trajectory in the rate of transmission, number of cases, and hospitalizations. We also must be considerate to the fact of the many family members and caregivers who might be at risk because the likelihood of transmission will be greatly enhanced by school Reopening. The public must also be fully engaged in these planning processes. The safety and welfare of students, teachers, and those who care for them is our greatest responsibility at this time, and we must act according to their best welfare.

Yours in abundance, Unity Group of Chattanooga

Sherman E. Matthews Jr., Chairman

Eric Atkins, Corresponding Secretary

Reference:

<http://schottfoundation.org/blog/2020/08/03/there-can-be-no-safe-and-just-re-opening-without-communities-and-educators-working>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/addm-community-report/differences-in-children.html>

<https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2020/american-academy-of-pediatrics-tracks-childrens-covid-19-cases-by-state-reflecting-increasing-cases/>