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PRESS RELEASE

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**COMMUNITY LEADERS, LABOR, PARENTS AND STUDENTS COME TOGETHER DEMANDING A
SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL**

DETROIT (July 28, 2020) A coalition of ten community organizations, labor unions including Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees (DAEOE), Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals (DFP), 482Forward, parents and students held a press conference to express their concern for the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) Reopening Plan for staff and students. During the press conference a public request was made on Saturday, July 25, for Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent, DPSCD, to meet and consult with labor leaders, educators, medical professionals and members of the community for the development and implementation of the reopening plan.

“The District needs to be planning for distance learning for all students, with few exceptions, and only consider in-person instruction when COVID cases are clearly declining and essential protocols are in place,” said Terrence Martin, President, DFT. “We recognize a need to pull public health experts into reopening discussions and to provide support on an ongoing basis. Testing and contact tracing in schools are essential strategies for mitigating the spread of COVID in our community. Any plan that falls short of this puts staff and students at risk. Data and medical experts must drive decisions around offering in-person instruction. Hopefully Dr. Vitti won’t ignore our concerns, will take the necessary step of addressing health and safety concerns with the unions.”

The core recommendation is to establish a city wide, school-based health COVID-19 Advisory Committee that will feature two subcommittees -- one with representatives from the Detroit and Wayne County Health Departments, local pediatricians, mental and infectious disease health experts; the second subcommittee will be comprised of community partners, school leaders and staff, educators, students, parents, and after-school experts. Schools should remain closed until confirmation from the advisory committee recommends that reopening is safe.

“The health and safety of students, educators and staff is paramount,” said Donna Jackson, President, DFP. “We are two weeks away from our scheduled start for our members to begin to return to work. However, many of our members are extremely concerned. There must be mandatory and regular testing protocols for all.”

Another proposal presented specifically addresses DPSCD protecting staffs health and safety by allowing all employees to opt into In-person work. COVID 19 has created circumstances that may make in-person work impossible for some. The ask is for the District to not require any employee to work in-person and provide alternative work options. Additionally, those who have contracted COVID-19, show symptoms or believe they have experienced exposure should not be docked a personal or sick day and be encouraged to isolate and stay home. The District must also not contract with private companies to outsource school services and/or staff jobs.

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“All employees are essential and should be treated as such,” said Stephanie Carreker, President, DAEOE. “No employee should be forced to return to work for fear of being terminated because they are having feelings of apprehension, because of their health, age or family issues; especially when there is still so much uncertainty surrounding COVID-19.”

The proposals submitted also addressed the possibility of some parents who may want to still enroll their child(ren) into DPSCD but wish to opt out of online learning. It was recommended that DPSCD provide physical packets and manipulatives for parents/families. The District cannot penalize students who opt to engage in physical packets and manipulatives for their learning.

“Parents in Detroit know this situation isn’t easy for school leaders nor our educators,” says Arlyssa Heard, parent of DPSCD student and member of 482Forward.” “Most of all we know this hasn’t been easy for us and our kids. We are calling on schools to prioritize our health and that takes all of us making hard choices. We’re asking schools to be virtual until we know it’s safe. For those parents who need in person - and we know there are some- we must ensure strict health protocols are in place!”

Links

[Reopening School Demands](#)

[482Forward Return to School Survey](#)

482 Forward is a citywide education organizing network in Detroit comprised of the following ten organizations:

- Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
- Urban Neighborhood Initiative
- Congress of Communities
- Hope Village Initiative
- Brightmoor Alliance
- ACCESS
- Total Life Christian Ministries
- Detroit Action
- MiStudentsDream
- Developing K.I.D.S

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