



Delaware Association of School Psychologists
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To whom it may concern;

My name is Brittany Zehr and I am the President of the Delaware Association of School Psychologists (DASP). I'm writing to you today, on behalf of DASP, in reference to the COVID-19 School Reopening Working Groups. We, at DASP, understand that this is a particularly challenging time filled with many unknown variables. We understand that decision makers must come together and make the best recommendations possible given these unknowns. We understand that this is not an easy task. DASP offers the following considerations for the working groups:

- First, DASP is here to help. While we are dismayed that we, as school based mental health professionals, who are uniquely trained in mental health, special education, and school based systems, were not invited to be members of any of the working group, we understand that we have specialized knowledge and skills that others simply do not possess. We invite any committee member to call upon us for information, guidance, clarification, or collaboration. Please feel free to email us, dasponline@gmail.com or call me personally (412-297-3324).
- Second, the National Organization of School Psychologists (NASP) has a plethora of COVID-19 resources related to service delivery, special education, crisis, and mental health for families and educators. These resources offer information related to each working group from a school psychology perspective.
- Third, the pandemic is not occurring in an educational vacuum. Prior to the pandemic, DDOE was planning on implementing updated special education regulations and new regulations related to multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). The implementation of these two changes was going to require a

significant amount of resources. This was prior to the pandemic. As we move forward, it is important that the proposed reopening plans take into consideration on-going initiatives and the resources and bandwidth that they require. Our capacity is limited and we need to make sure plans are in place to either build capacity and/or to make sure our capacity is utilized as efficiently as possible.

- Fourth, academics and equity. We are pleased that this is a separate working group. This is a large complex topic, which will be submitting further public comment on at a later date. In the meantime, we would encourage the committee to, from the beginning, think about underlying issues in equity in education and formulate a plan that not only addresses the short term problems for returning to school, but seeks to proactively address the root causes of inequity in education.
- Fifth, related service providers, such as school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists occupy specialized niches in the education realm. Practicing in these specialized niches presents unique challenges. Because we are specialized, the unique needs of our professions are often overlooked when plans are developed, even when we are essential components of those plans. For example, in order to conduct a comprehensive psychoeducational assessment, which is necessary for special education eligibility and ensuring appropriate services are provided, school psychologists need to work face to face with students. We also need time to conduct the assessments and write comprehensive, integrated reports. Given the face to face nature of our work, the pandemic has created a backlog of psychoeducational assessments that need to be conducted. Logistically, it may not be possible for even the most well intentioned school psychologist and/or district to complete all assessments necessary by September 30th, especially given the amount of mental health and behavioral support services we anticipate being called upon to assist with when students and staff return to school. We urge all the working groups to consider the specialized nature of related service providers during discussions and when making recommendations.
- Sixth, we encourage the working groups to take into serious consideration the physical and psychological safety of both students and staff. Because this is another large and complex topic, DASP anticipates providing further comment and guidance documents for the working groups.

In closing, we would like to thank you for your membership in the working groups. We recognize that every individual and organization brings unique knowledge and skills to this challenging endeavor. We, once again, offer our support to you as you work to support the school communities, educators, and students in Delaware.

Sincerely,

Brittany J. Zehr

Brittany J. Zehr, Ed.S, NCSP

President

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