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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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July 9, 2020

The Honorable Curt Sonney
Majority Chairman
House Education Committee
Rm. 214 ROB
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Sonney,

I hope that you and your family are doing well during this crisis.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the COVID-19 emergency in our country has been unprecedented and massive in its scope. It has impacted likely every home, every business, and most assuredly every school in our state. While we have made some progress, increased our knowledge of the virus, and in some ways, improved our response capabilities, I am concerned about the readiness of our schools to return this fall.

Mr. Chairman, during our June 17th Education Committee, I complimented you on the record for putting together an informative panel. It is in that spirit that I write to you today.

Mr. Chairman, given the volume of issues and challenges facing our teachers, students, and parents this fall, I respectfully ask that you schedule additional virtual hearings, like our June 17th hearing, throughout the remainder of this summer. This would increase our knowledge of the problems, likely lead to a better understanding of guidelines, best practices and expectations, but they may also lead to more timely, bipartisan legislation that could help our schools.

Mr. Chairman, I am sure we all agree that for the majority of students, in-person learning from a qualified teacher is preferred. School districts in my area are doing the best they can to plan for the safe physical reopening of all their schools. But they are dealing with new guidelines, changing guidelines, untested lessons learned from the spring closure, wide diversity of health needs for students and staff, and unfortunately, a hyper-partisan political environment that only makes their job more difficult.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that under your leadership the Education Committee can and must be more involved in this process. We could have additional hearings on such important COVID-19 related topics like the mental health of our students and staff, providing FAPE online, safety in the classroom, physical changes to classrooms and schools, standardized testing, blended learning, certifications, continuing education, and CTE issues, distance learning requirements, best practices, and training, sports and extracurricular activities, postsecondary learning, budgetary concerns, the need for qualified substitutes, to name just a few. We also should be hearing regularly from PDE and be able to ask questions directly to them like we did to all the participants at our June 17th hearing.

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Mr. Chairman there are simply a myriad of challenges facing our schools and I wanted to write to you formally to ask you to bring us together throughout this summer to address them. If my office can be of any assistance in this effort, please let me know.

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matter.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Miller", written over a horizontal line.

Dan Miller
Member, 42nd Legislative District
Allegheny County