

Francesca Cortese

Good evening.

I would like to start by thanking the members of the board and the administration for your dedication in serving the Chartiers-Houston students, teachers, and parents. These are unprecedented times, and you have recently been tasked with making difficult decisions. I appreciate your service to the community.

I am a proud graduate of Chartiers-Houston, a teacher, and a parent of two current CH students. Recently, I have expressed my serious concerns about a return to in-person instruction. These concerns have been heightened after learning about numerous failed school reopenings in other states. Schools around the country are being forced to shut down days after reopening, students, teachers, and their families are dealing with mandatory quarantines, and parents are now scrambling to make emergency adjustments concerning work and childcare. I do not think it is wise to begin the year with a reopening plan that jeopardizes the safety of students and staff only to inevitably collapse.

We have amazing teachers, administrators, and support staff that treat our children like family and give them the best education possible. I am worried for all of them. According to the district's Health and Safety Plan, the district was to "survey at-risk staff members to gauge their intentions in returning to work." I assume that this has been done, and I am interested to know how many of our teachers plan to retire, quit, or take a leave of absence. I fear that we will lose many experienced teachers and be forced to fill these vacancies with under-qualified or inexperienced replacements at a time when substitutes are in short supply and teaching is more difficult than ever. This plan also states that the district will "consult with attorneys and district human resource officials to offer special accommodations for personnel who are members of vulnerable populations." As a district, have we offered these

accommodations to teachers and staff members who are considered high-risk should they contract Covid-19, or who have high-risk family members at home? Have we inspected and made improvements to the HVAC systems to limit the spread of the virus within our buildings?

As a teacher, I understand the social and emotional benefits of students physically being in school under normal circumstances. However, these circumstances are far from normal, and those benefits can only be enjoyed if the school is a safe place for students, teachers, and staff. Unfortunately, it currently is not. As a single parent, I understand the serious issues regarding working parents and childcare, and I also know that there were problems with the abrupt switch to virtual learning last spring. These problems are difficult but solvable. The loss of a student, teacher, or community member is not. I am also unconvinced that our district, or any district, is prepared to begin an effective hybrid model of instruction in less than one week. I am unsure of the availability of the necessary technology for students and staff, and I am also skeptical that our teachers feel comfortable with its implementation.

I would like to emphasize that I do not believe this situation is the fault of our administration or our school board. A lack of clear and consistent guidelines at the state and federal level is forcing all of you to make impossible decisions, and I do not envy you your position. However, for the sake of the students, the teachers, the support staff, and our community, I am again asking the board to either delay the scheduled start of the school year or begin the year with a designated period of all-virtual instruction. Thank you.