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September 28, 2020

Robert W. Runcie  
Superintendent  
Broward County Public Schools  
600 SE Third Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301

Donna P. Korn  
Chair of the School Board of Broward County  
600 SE Third Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301

Dear Superintendent Runcie and Chair Korn:

We are grateful for Broward County Public Schools' (BCPS) prompt reply to our September 25 letter and the opportunity to review your feedback. After careful review, we have determined that the response lacks any of the data or plan revisions requested in our letter. Furthermore, your reply lacks any of the self-imposed analysis your letter references from page 11 of your approved reopening plan ([www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7588/urlt/Broward-ReopenPlan.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7588/urlt/Broward-ReopenPlan.pdf)).

Consequently, we understand your response to constitute the third option from our September 25 letter: you appear to be withdrawing your plan and proceeding under the existing statutory framework. In the interest of being absolutely certain that your intent is to withdraw your reopening plan, we are asking that you plainly state this is the direction you are taking. If your intent is to follow your approved plan or revise your plan, please state that and provide the respective data that drives either decision no later than October 2, 2020.

We hope you agree there is an urgent need for Broward County's 260,000-plus students to have access to the best education possible, an in-person education in front of a great teacher with the benefits of peer-to-peer learning. That urgency is clear based on your recently submitted attendance data that showed only 0.99% of Broward County students were learning in person, the lowest number in Florida for a brick-and-mortar school district. Failure to offer students the high-quality education to which they are entitled poses negative life-long impacts for Broward County's 56.2% of students who are economically disadvantaged, 11.8% who are English Language Learners and 14.4% who are students with disabilities ([edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=06](http://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=06)).

For comparison, the School District of Palm Beach County, which was approved for Phase 2 on September 4, welcomed all students to return to in-person instruction on September 21 and had approximately 60,000 highly at-risk students back on campuses the week prior (31.2% of students). Despite Broward being approved for Phase 2 on September 11 and now all counties moving to Phase 3 on September 25 (<https://www.flgov.com/2020-executive-orders/>), your letter references the dates October 14, 16 and 20 for in-person reopening. We hope you can understand our intentions in asking to actually see the analysis done to warrant delaying the reopening of school campuses – delays that will almost certainly result in under educating students, especially at-risk students.

To the extent you are moving forward with your approved plan or revising your plan, we do wish to proactively contribute input to help accelerate your decision-making. Your September 25 letter references your approved reopening plan's five "primary factors which BCPS will consider for the return to providing five days a week brick-and-mortar, or a hybrid of brick-and-mortar and eLearning." Although omitted from your letter, the analysis that you assured would be completed on page 11 of your reopening plan supports reopening your schools for in-person instruction for families that have chosen this option.

As your letter stated, your analysis would examine the following factors:

- *"The status of Broward County on the State of Florida Department of Health phase designation. As of July 31, 2020, Broward County remains in Phase 1 status.*
- *Disease progression (e.g. infection rate, positivity rate trends, absolute positivity rate).*
- *Ability to manage the spread (e.g. test result turn-around time, contact tracing capacity).*
- *Health system capacity (e.g. COVID hospitalization rate, hospital bed/ICU capacity).*
- *District Safeguards (e.g. Availability of PPE and sanitization materials)."*

I hope that the following input from our Department is helpful in concluding your analysis and moving forward with the necessary decisions to reopen schools and fully serve Broward County's many at-risk students:

### ***Phases***

- Broward County was approved for Phase 2 on September 11 and all counties moved to Phase 3 on September 25.

### ***Positivity Rate***

- While we would never suggest that positivity rate is a lone factor to consider, your assurances certainly did place considerable weight behind this statistic, and Broward County's health care community should actually be quite proud of the collective work done to be a leader in this regard.
- According to the Florida Department of Health's (FDOH) COVID-19 Data and Surveillance Dashboard, Broward County's 3.53% positivity rate for September 14-20 was the 12<sup>th</sup> best rate amongst the 67 counties and lower than your similarly situated

peers in Palm Beach County, who opened for at-risk students the week of September 14 and all students the week of September 21.

County	Positivity Rate 8/31 to 9/6	Positivity Rate 9/7 to 9/13	Positivity Rate 9/14 to 9/20
Broward	3.34%	3.25%	3.53%
Palm Beach	3.97%	4.13%	3.76%

(See:

[fdoh.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/8d0de33f260d444c852a615dc7837c86](http://fdoh.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/8d0de33f260d444c852a615dc7837c86))

- The trend line for Broward County's positivity rate has actually been quite positive for months. Since late July, Broward's positivity rate has been under 10% and since August, under 5%. Broward's positivity rate has even been under 3% for eight of the last 14 days ([http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/partners/covid19\\_report\\_archive/county\\_reports\\_late\\_st.pdf](http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/partners/covid19_report_archive/county_reports_late_st.pdf)).

### ***Testing and Contact Tracing***

- There is no question that the realities of testing and contact tracing has uniquely impacted schools statewide. However, Florida's district and school leaders in 65 other counties have already successfully transitioned to school campus reopenings since the first schools opened on August 10. County departments of health have been supporting districts and schools in this regard, collaboratively implementing systems that data show are actually in excess of what is necessary, weighing more heavily on the side of aggressively contact tracing.
- There is evidence that Broward will find success in joining these other 65 counties, which have already learned the great lesson that the sooner districts and schools reopen, the sooner they can settle into this temporary new normal. This point was articulated by Pinellas Superintendent Mike Grego at our September 23 State Board of Education meeting ([thefloridachannel.org/videos/9-23-20-state-board-of-education-meeting/](http://thefloridachannel.org/videos/9-23-20-state-board-of-education-meeting/)) and by Manatee Superintendent Cynthia Saunders and School Board Member Dr. Hopes in our "Best Practices for Reopening Schools" webinar (see the PowerPoint and recording at [www.fldoe.org/em-response/documents.shtml](http://www.fldoe.org/em-response/documents.shtml)).
- In total, of the nearly 1.3 million students who are already learning in-person around the state, FDOH most recently reported to us that since August 10 only 0.09% of students have tested positive and a total of 1.37% of students were impacted by either exposure or those who tested positive. Furthermore, the secondary transmission rate is 0.27% amongst students and adults exposed to a positive case. The data have overwhelmingly validated leading researchers who reported that students are safe, students very rarely transmit the virus and our concerns should frankly be directed at the behaviors of adults.

**Health Systems**

- The trend lines in Broward are thankfully very positive, reinforcing BCPS’ readiness to welcome students back to campuses. The Agency for Health Care Administration reports that 24.49% of all hospital beds, 26.64% of ICU beds and 42.62% of pediatric ICU beds are open in Broward  
[\(bi.ahca.myflorida.com/t/ABICC/views/Public/HospitalBedsCounty?:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y\).](http://bi.ahca.myflorida.com/t/ABICC/views/Public/HospitalBedsCounty?:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y)
- According to FDOH’s COVID-19 Data and Surveillance Dashboard, Broward County’s trend lines for emergency department visits with COVID-like illnesses are also sharply declining. Comparing the week of August 10 to the week of September 14, Broward has seen a 56.22% decline in weekly emergency department (ED) visits with COVID-like illnesses.

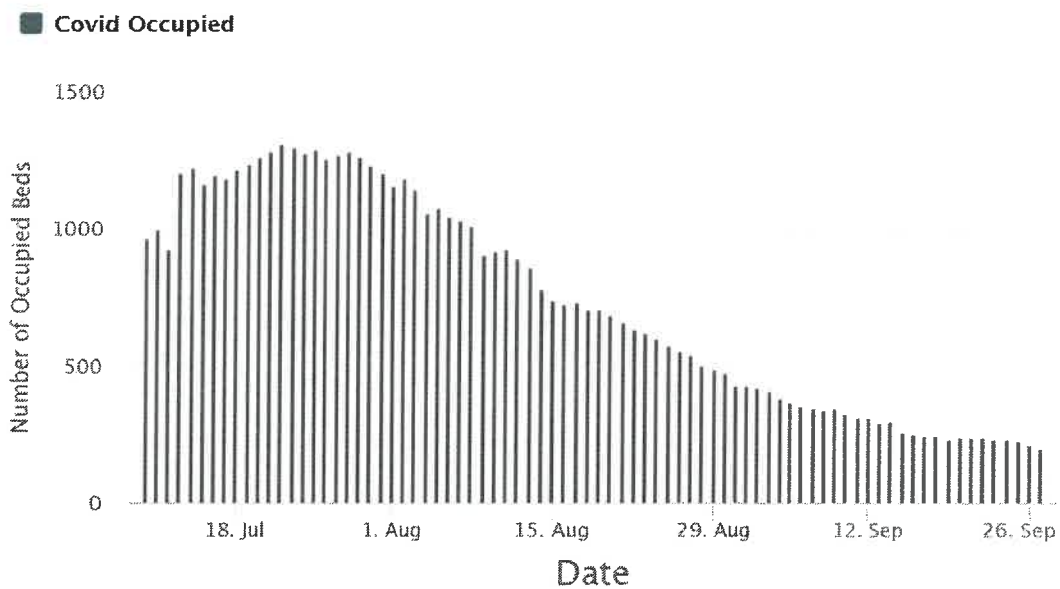
<b>Broward County</b>	<b>8/10 to 8/16</b>	<b>8/17 to 8/23</b>	<b>8/24 to 8/30</b>	<b>8/31 to 9/6</b>	<b>9/7 to 9/13</b>	<b>9/14 to 9/20</b>
<b>ED Visits</b>	434	362	282	249	213	190
<b>Decrease</b>		<b>-72</b>	<b>-80</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>-23</b>
<b>Percent Decrease</b>		<b>-16.59%</b>	<b>-22.10%</b>	<b>-11.70%</b>	<b>-14.46%</b>	<b>-10.80%</b>
<b>Totals</b>						<b>-244</b> <b>-56.22%</b>

(See:

[fdoh.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/8d0de33f260d444c852a615dc7837c86](http://fdoh.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/8d0de33f260d444c852a615dc7837c86))

- Data from Florida Atlantic University (FAU) reinforces this trend line. According to FAU, on September 27, there were only 202 COVID-19-occupied hospital beds in Broward County, as compared to July 22 when there were 1,313 COVID-19-occupied hospital beds in Broward County ([business.fau.edu/covidtracker/data/broward-data/](http://business.fau.edu/covidtracker/data/broward-data/)). This is a massive 85% decline since late July.

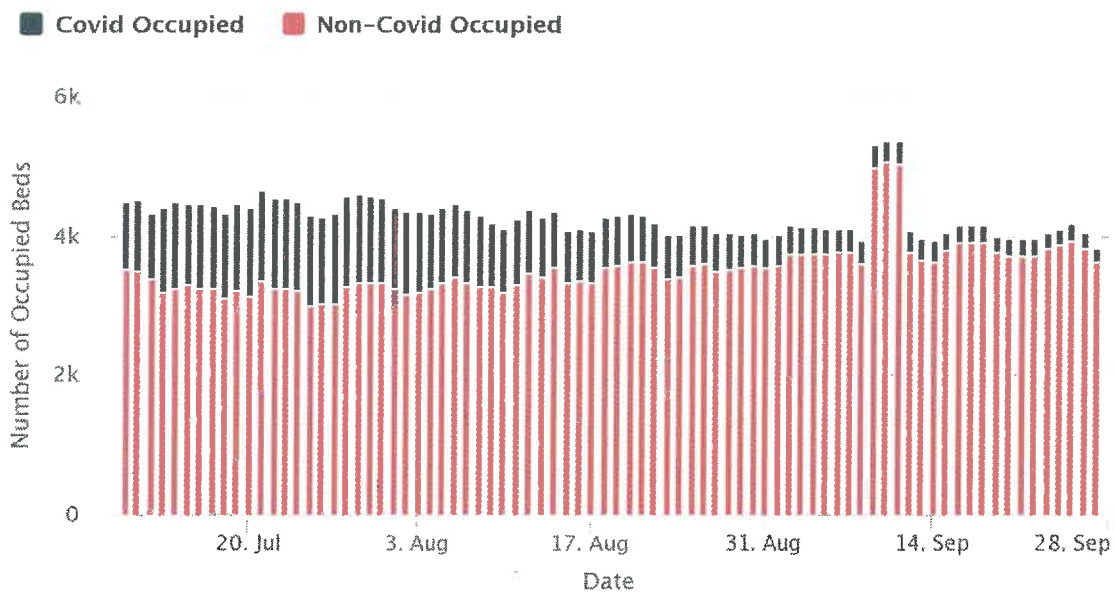
### Broward County Covid-Occupied Hospital Beds



- COVID-19-occupied hospital beds now represent only 5% of all occupied hospital beds in Broward County.

### Broward County Covid-Occupied Hospital Beds

Covid vs. Non-Covid



***District Safeguards***

- You certainly are more knowledgeable than we are regarding your preparations to create safe learning environments, acquire PPE and establish a plan for regularly cleaning and sanitizing schools. We can only hope that over the last six months you have not wasted time in doing so.
- We released our recommendations for “Reopening Florida’s Schools and the CARES Act” on June 11 ([www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/19861/urlt/FLDOEReopeningCARESAct.pdf](http://www.fl DOE.org/core/fileparse.php/19861/urlt/FLDOEReopeningCARESAct.pdf)).
- On June 17, our department submitted a budget amendment requesting a \$27,410,089 increase in budget authority for federal grants to cover the costs associated with school districts’ response to COVID-19. BCPS was paid \$3,992,710.41 for actual expenditures submitted.
- Soon thereafter you began gathering parents’ feedback for reopening. Your district surveyed families June 26 through July 6 (<https://broward.us/2020/06/30/2020-21-school-pre-registration-questionnaire/>), and you publicly reported those results at various points through July ([www.local10.com/news/local/2020/07/14/broward-schools-to-extend-distance-learning-to-2020-2021-school-year/](http://www.local10.com/news/local/2020/07/14/broward-schools-to-extend-distance-learning-to-2020-2021-school-year/)). You reported approximately 32% demand for “eLearning,” 35% for a hybrid model, 30% for face-to-face learning, 2% for Broward Virtual School and 1% for other ([bcpsagenda.browardschools.com/agenda/01791/Item%201A%20\(69566\)/SUPP\\_DOCS/Exhibits/Doc2.pdf](http://bcpsagenda.browardschools.com/agenda/01791/Item%201A%20(69566)/SUPP_DOCS/Exhibits/Doc2.pdf)).
- On August 10, through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) from the CARES Act, we then awarded BCPS nearly \$62 million that can be utilized for all manner of protective and mitigating measures to open schools safely.
- Additionally, throughout the response and recovery to the pandemic, we have provided BCPS and all school districts with dozens of supports in the form of webinars, technical memorandums, emergency waivers of statute and rule, flexibility in meeting reporting deadlines and examples of state and national best practices (<http://www.fl DOE.org/em-response/documents.shtml>).

In summation, we hope this input is helpful in accelerating your timeline to returning your students and staff back to educationally optimal learning conditions that data continue to prove is both safe and manageable.

Both media and our conversations directly with you indicate that Broward County would be ready to open for all students by October 5, a date that, on its face, is already nearly two months after reopenings began in many districts that have far fewer resources than Broward County. However, media reports are suggesting that Broward is delaying its reopening not due to any of the metrics above. Rather, without explanation, it appears that BCPS is delaying reopening due simply to political pressure. We hope what has been portrayed in media reports is not the case.

Superintendent Runcie and Chair Korn  
September 28, 2020  
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Please take the time to clarify your position on these matters, identify clearly the option you are choosing, provide your transparent analysis and settle these unsettling suggestions reported in the media. Your students, families and staff deserve this clarity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Corcoran", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Corcoran  
Commissioner

RC/jak