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**ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, July 17, 2020**--Today the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County (TAAAC), Secretaries and Assistants Association of Anne Arundel County (SAAAAC), and Association of Educational Leaders (AEL) issued a joint statement about the reopening of schools. Their Announcement follows:

We, the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County (TAAAC), Secretaries and Assistants Association of Anne Arundel County (SAAAAC), and Association of Educational Leaders (AEL) support the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU) and Maryland PTA's position on returning to school for the 2020-2021 school year. We support a virtual return to start the school year rather than a return to physical school buildings in September because it is the safest option for our students, educators, and families.

We believe that at the present time there is still much work to secure proper safety and health protocols to ensure the well-being of all students and staff of Anne Arundel County Public Schools. While many considerations have been made in the best interests of providing the highest quality education for all students in Anne Arundel County, there are still more questions to be answered. We know there is no better alternative to learning having teachers, school administrative and support personnel in front of students providing an environment that encourages collaboration, exploration, and creativity, but it must not come at the expense of our children's and staff's health. TAAAC, SAAAAC, and AEL want to work with Anne Arundel County Public Schools as full partners in the work to secure a school environment ready to welcome all of our students and staff in learning without fear for their health.

Teachers, school administrators, and other staff have been invested in summer learning and preparing for a more robust virtual learning model than was offered in the spring. It's important to make sure that students would benefit not just academically, but socially and emotionally from interaction with their peers and school staff despite virtual learning.

This model would allow Anne Arundel County Public Schools the time needed to fully secure the protocols necessary for a return to in-person learning when it is safe for all. Further, in a time when the school system budget has been reduced from what was originally requested before the pandemic, we have reservations that the limited current resources are sufficient to keep our students, teachers, administrators and other school-



based employees safe and successful or that the additional expenses required to meet these needs is prudent.

As stated in the MSEA, BTU, and MD PTA letter, there are many issues that raise concern if we return to the physical space before it is fully safe. COVID-19 has already proven to be disproportionately detrimental to our Black and Brown communities. This pandemic has also impacted our communities of lower economic status. Placing our students and staff in environments that will potentially increase their exposure, whether through busing, classrooms without proper ventilation, or inadequate PPE is irresponsible.

TAAAC, SAAAAC, and AEL believe that it is best for students to be in school and learning with their peers, but this cannot be done in a manner that potentially costs more lives. TAAAC, SAAAAC, and AEL stand firm in our support of MSEA, BTU, and MD PTA in calling for an initial virtual start to the 2020-21 school year.

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