



CEA'S

CRITICAL STEPS TO
PRIORITIZE HEALTH,
SAFETY, AND EQUITY

SAFE LEARNING PLAN

CEA'S SAFE LEARNING PLAN

THE CHALLENGE IN 2020–2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on a hard truth that our members know—unless the state and federal government take strong steps to provide resources to school districts, Connecticut's students, teachers, and staff will lack:

- Equitable access to critical safety protections, and
- The educational resources and tools needed for meaningful learning.

Circumstances in Connecticut and throughout the country have changed multiple times in the past four months. CEA's Safe Learning Plan continues to prioritize health, safety, and equity. We strongly advocate that the state amend its plan to include the specifics outlined here as to safety in education for all students, and all teachers and staff.

Any return to the classroom must be done in full compliance with expert health and safety guidelines. In addition, Connecticut must enhance its plans for remote learning for at-risk students and teachers, which will be necessary for some under any scenario, and may be necessary for all if circumstances warrant.

BACKGROUND

The Connecticut State Department of Education's plan to reopen schools this fall presently requires that local school districts shoulder the burden of implementing and paying for COVID-related costs, including PPE. This is unacceptable and will worsen inequities that already exist in financially challenged school districts.

While Connecticut has seen a lessening impact of the virus, COVID-19 infection rates are accelerating in many other parts of the country. Connecticut has so far succeeded and must remain vigilant in reducing the infection rate, and that includes being cautious in the reopening of activities that can spread the virus, such as any reopening of schools.

Educators know that the best education occurs in the classroom, but educators are not in favor of reopening schools in a manner that jeopardizes the health and safety of students, educators and their families, and increases infection rates in our communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEA's Six Recommended Requirements For The 2020-2021 School Year:

- Do not open school buildings if Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and public health and safety requirements cannot be met.
- For any school reopening, guarantee that funding for COVID-related expenses will be provided by the state so that all school districts can meet the CDC and public health and safety requirements.
- Recognize and address the risks for students, teachers, and staff in school during a pandemic.
- Understand that moving the economy forward is dependent on the *safety* of schools, not on the mere *reopening* of schools.
- Allow schools to begin the school year through distance/remote learning where necessary; for any in-class learning, require that districts reduce density and allow staggered schedules to meet CDC and public health and safety requirements.
- Institute testing for all students, teachers, and staff who return to school, once per week, and institute contact tracing protocols.

Safety First

CEA's Safe Learning Plan promotes the safety of all while providing a way forward whether in school, or through remote learning. Educators want to teach their students in person, but in a pandemic it is critical that our schools are safe for all students, teachers, staff, and their families. If schools are not safe, they should not reopen.

Follow the Advice of Public Health Experts

The Safe Learning Plan outlines steps that must be taken so that educators can teach and students are able to learn in safe environments—in every school district. CEA's Safe Learning Plan prioritizes health and safety based on the advice of health experts.

Protect Connecticut's Progress

We must protect the sacrifices and progress we have made since the March shutdown that resulted in a decrease of virus infections. The state's plan—calling for a full-time return to school for all students—raises serious questions about maintaining safety during a pandemic that is worsening in other states. Safe schools require protections that work in demanding school settings. The roadmap to in-school instruction must be clear and focused on protecting the health of our school populations.

Safety Requirements

Appropriate accommodations must be made for students and staff at higher risk, and appropriate guidelines must be in place to provide a safe learning and teaching environment that includes but is not limited to:

- Following all public health requirements for schools, including state-provided personal protective equipment, disinfecting classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and commonly shared areas and equipment daily, six feet of spacing between students in classrooms, and more.
- Reducing density on school buses to ensure adherence to CDC social distancing guidelines.
- Testing for COVID-19, with contact tracing protocols in place.
- Monitoring students for virus symptoms.

Equity for All School Districts

The move to distance learning highlighted huge inequities among our districts, particularly severe in urban districts and communities of color. The state's wealthy communities provided laptops and other online learning devices, while poorer school districts had difficulty providing hard-copy packets for distance learning. Students were not getting the instruction they needed—a problem worsened by inadequate access to technology. Reopening schools without additional funding for districts in need will make inequities worse, and deepen the racial divide. In addition, enhanced outreach and accommodations must be provided for special needs students, English learners, and their educators.

Resources and Partnerships

The state must ensure that funding is available to all districts for the resources required to meet CDC guidelines and other protections. Schools will need more funding, not less, as students return with increased needs due to learning loss, trauma from the pandemic, and time away from school. Before parents send their children back to school, and before educators enter their classrooms, districts must have the funds necessary to make schools safe. We must prevent schools from being incubators for spreading COVID-19 and contributing to another economic shutdown. For our state to recover, businesses and other constituencies must be part of the solution. A workable plan must connect community partners where all—not just schools—share in meeting the responsibilities to our children. Companies should provide flexible schedules for employees to accommodate school schedules. Daycare options must be a priority.

Conclusion

CEA's Safe Learning Plan will strengthen the plan recently released by the state. It requires that health and safety remain at the forefront of any school reopening plan. It prioritizes long-term strategies for student learning and educational equity, which require that the state do its part and provide the necessary funding. Failing to fund our future means we will see greater inequities across our districts and jeopardize the health and well-being of communities throughout the state.



SIX SAFETY REQUIREMENTS AND RATIONALE

1. Do not open school buildings if Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and public health and safety requirements cannot be met.

The CDC has offered three cautionary risk ratings regarding reopening schools. The guiding principle for each is that the more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. The risk of COVID-19 spread increases in school settings as follows:

- **Lowest Risk:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
- **More Risk:** Small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Groups of students stay together and with the same teacher throughout/across school days and groups do not mix. Students remain at least 6 feet apart and do not share objects (e.g., hybrid virtual and in-person class structures, or staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes).
- **Highest Risk:** Full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students are not spaced apart, they share classroom materials or supplies, and they mix between classes and activities.¹

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recently issued a report, titled *Reopening K-12 Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prioritizing Health, Equity, and Communities*. It contains the following requirements for reopening schools in order to protect students and staff:

- Provide surgical masks for all teachers and staff. All students and staff should wear face masks. Younger children may have difficulty using face masks, but schools should encourage compliance.
- Provide handwashing stations or hand sanitizer for all people who enter school buildings, minimize contact with shared surfaces, and increase regular surface cleaning.
- Limit large gatherings of students, such

as during assemblies, in the cafeteria, and overcrowding at school entrances, possibly by staggering arrival times.

- Reorganize classrooms to enable physical distancing, such as by limiting class sizes or moving instruction to larger spaces. The report says cohorting, when a group of 10 or fewer students stay with the same staff as much as possible, is a promising strategy for physical distancing.
- Prioritize cleaning, ventilation, and air filtration, while recognizing that these alone will not sufficiently lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Create a culture of health and safety in every school, and enforce virus mitigation guidelines using positive approaches rather than by disciplining students.²

At Hartford HealthCare, a statistical model produced in conjunction with MIT projects a small increase in cases between now and September, before a potential surge later, Dr. Ajay Kumar said. Kumar, the chief clinical officer at Hartford HealthCare, urged residents to wear masks, practice social distancing and minimize travel to COVID-19 hotspots. “It is really time for us to be vigilant,” he said. “We really cannot afford to have the same situation we had in April and May going forward into fall and winter. This disease is not going to go away. It’s going to persist in our community, and it’s going to come back.”³



2. For any school reopening, guarantee that funding for COVID-related expenses will be provided by the state so that all school districts can meet the CDC and public health and safety requirements.

Reopening schools must be premised on having the funding and resources necessary to do so safely, with the required precautions and protocols. Connecticut can meet this obligation by:

- Immediately allocating the required funding for coronavirus-related educational expenses. This would include but not be limited to costs for PPE, testing, additional classroom space, staffing due to additional/reduced-size classes, transportation, and more.
- Immediately allow access to School Construction Bonding Funds to be used for coronavirus-related infrastructure expenses. This would include but not be limited to HVAC expenses, reconfiguring classrooms, installing protective barriers, and other related expenses.
- Raise the permissible carry-forward of 2% of unexpended school funds (current law) to 5%, provided the funds are used solely for educational purposes and remain under the purview of the board of education, without requiring board of finance approval.

The report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Reopening K-12 Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prioritizing Health, Equity, and Communities*, says the cost of implementing these COVID-19 precautions will be high, totaling approximately \$1.8 million for a school district with eight school buildings and around 3,200 students. These costs are coming at a financially uncertain moment for many school districts, and could lead to funding shortfalls. While the size of the funding shortfall will depend on how well-resourced a school district is, many districts will be unable to afford implementing the entire suite of mitigation measures, potentially leaving students and staff in those districts at greater risk of infection.⁴

The state and the federal government must respond to this funding crisis. Congress should quickly make sufficient funding available to states and localities to support K-12 education for the fall. Extra funds

should be available to public school districts that would be expected to face the greatest gaps in staffing and infrastructure, based on formulas that measure the number of children who receive nutritional assistance and special education services.⁵

3. Recognize and address the risks for students, teachers, and staff in school during a pandemic.

While young students are not as at-risk as older students or adults in schools, students can and have become infected with COVID-19, and can suffer adverse health consequences that in some cases require hospitalization. Students are capable of spreading the virus to other students, to adults in the school, and to those at home or in the community. As a result, great caution must be maintained as required in all other jurisdictions and places overseen by the state and municipalities.

Recently, Dr. Kevin Dieckhaus, chief of infectious diseases at the University of Connecticut, said that concerns that the virus could re-emerge are well founded, and that in states where the infection rate is spiking upwards, young people are playing a role in spreading the virus. “We know that young adults, who may not themselves become ill from COVID-19, have been driving the epidemic in current hotspot states,” he said. “Although they themselves may not become ill, disease transmission has moved from this population to more vulnerable populations.”⁶

Bringing large numbers of school-age children together could help drive transmission of the virus, Dieckhaus said. He said children could then transmit the disease to more vulnerable parents and grandparents or perhaps to teachers who may be at risk. “Institution of appropriate social distancing in the school environment would certainly reduce the risk but may be difficult to fully implement in a setting with large numbers of young children,” he said.⁷

Dr. Jeffrey Shaman, an environmental health and infectious disease expert at Columbia University, said he believes reopening schools is risky, and noted that some research has shown children could pass the new coronavirus on to their families. “I haven’t seen enough evidence to convince me that children are less involved in the transmission of COVID-19,” he said.⁸

Evidence is growing that children older than 10 years old spread the virus in the same manner as adults. A large, recently completed study from South Korea concludes that while children younger than 10 transmit to others less often than adults do, the risk is not zero, and those between the ages of 10 and 19 can spread the virus at least as well as adults do. The findings suggest that as schools reopen, communities will see clusters of infection take root that include children of all ages, several experts cautioned.⁹

“I fear that there has been this sense that kids just won’t get infected or don’t get infected in the same way as adults and that, therefore, they’re almost like a bubbled population,” said Dr. Michael Osterholm, an infectious diseases expert at the University of Minnesota. “There will be transmission,” Osterholm said. “What we have to do is accept that now and include that in our plans.”¹⁰

He and other experts say schools need to prepare for infections to pop up. Apart from implementing physical distancing, hand hygiene and masks, schools should also decide when and how to test students and staff—including, for example, bus drivers—when and how long to require people to quarantine, and when to decide to close and reopen schools.¹¹

The track record on reopening schools around the world has been mixed so far—some countries like Denmark and Finland have successfully reopened schools, but others, like China, Israel and South Korea, have had to close them down again.¹²

Dr. Mobeen Rathore, a pediatric infectious disease expert in Jacksonville, Florida, recently said that children can still become very sick with COVID-19. “COVID-19 is an equal opportunity infection,” Rathore said. “There’s no reason that the child cannot get infected or a child has any less chance of getting infected than an adult; (it) just so happens children don’t get that ill.”

The bigger concern, Rathore said, is transmitting the virus to teachers and other staff at the schools. There is also a risk that students can transmit the disease to parents and grandparents at home, he said. “Coronavirus can certainly kill children just as it can kill adults, but the chances of a child dying of the coronavirus are much lower than for adults,” Rathore said.¹³

All educators would prefer to teach students in the classroom, and agree that students do best when learning in school. Educators and public health experts also agree that safety and health must be the first priority. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently released a recommendation stating, “the goal should be to have students physically present in school.” Their recommendations were used by some to mean that a return to school should occur even if safety protocols could not be met. The Academy of Pediatrics recently objected to their statements being used to downplay the need for safety measures and public health priorities.

“It’s unfortunate that our guidance is being politicized by some and misinterpreted to mean a universal return to school no matter what,” said Dr. Sally Goza, President of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “That is not what we recommend. When public health expertise is reframed to fit political interests, it harms those who have the most at stake and least opportunity to advocate for themselves—children.”

“Schools will need new resources to keep students, teachers and staff safe,” said Goza. “I am very concerned by recent statements from federal leaders threatening to withhold federal funds from schools that do not pursue in-person reopening in the fall. This would put already financially strapped schools in an impossible position that would endanger the very people we are trying to protect.”¹⁴

The American Academy of Pediatrics joined with the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the School Superintendents Association on July 10, 2020, to jointly emphasize the shared priority of health and safety.

“Returning to school is important for the healthy development and well-being of children, but we must pursue re-opening in a way that is safe for all students, teachers and staff. Science should drive decision-making on safely reopening schools. Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics. We should leave it to health experts to tell us when the time is best to open up school buildings, and listen to educators and administrators to shape how we do it...”

Their statement also noted, “Reopening schools in a way that maximizes safety, learning, and the well-being of children, teachers, and staff will clearly require substantial new investments in our schools and campuses. We call on Congress and the administration to provide the federal resources needed to ensure that inadequate funding does not stand in the way of safely educating and caring for children in our schools. Withholding funding from schools that do not open in person full-time would be a misguided approach, putting already financially strapped schools in an impossible position that would threaten the health of students and teachers.”¹⁵

4. Understand that moving the economy forward is dependent on the *safety* of schools, not on the mere *reopening* of schools.

There is a misleading proposition that the health of the economy depends on returning to school. This idea fails the logic test, and misses a critical point, as explained by the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Thomas Frieden.

“This concept that it’s about health versus economics is really misguided. James Carville said, ‘It’s the economy, stupid.’ Well, it’s a pandemic, stupid,” Frieden said. “If people don’t feel safe going out, we’re not going to get our economy back.”¹⁶

The goal in any reopening of Connecticut’s schools must be to do so safely, in a scientific manner that is sustainable and that complies with CDC and public health requirements. If done in a manner that is not safe, the spread of the virus through schools could contribute to another shutdown of schools, and businesses.

“For me the goal is not just to open, it’s to stay open,” Frieden said. “If we open for a week or two and have to shut down the nation again, that would be a much worse travesty for our nation’s young children.”¹⁷

Los Angeles School Superintendent Austin Beutner, said on July 13, 2020, that the “health and safety of all in the school community is not something we can compromise.” Los Angeles is experiencing an increase in COVID infections, and Beutner said that schools must have protections in place to avoid being

places where the virus can spread further into the community.

“Reopening schools will significantly increase the interaction between children and adults from different families. A 10-year-old student might have a 30-year-old teacher, a 50-year-old bus driver or live with a 70-year-old grandmother. All need to be protected. There’s a public health imperative to keep schools from becoming a Petri dish,” Beutner said.¹⁸

5. Allow schools to begin the school year through remote learning where necessary; for any in-class learning, require that districts reduce density and allow staggered schedules to meet CDC and public health and safety requirements.

The CDC recommends “staying home when appropriate,” whether individual circumstances warrant staying at home based on risk or exposure, or more broadly in a district or state if infection rates spike upward. The CDC also recommends:

- Staggering arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort or put in place other protocols to limit contact between cohorts and direct contact with parents as much as possible.

When possible, use flexible worksites (remote/online) and flexible work hours (staggered start times) to help establish policies and practices for social distancing (maintaining distance of approximately 6 feet) between students, staff and others.¹⁹

Countries where a return to school has so far not resulted in re-closures have employed various safety protocols including testing, reduction of density, and steps such as:

- Staggered schedules to limit numbers in the building at any one time (Australia);
- Attend on alternating days (Netherlands);
- Capped class sizes to enable distancing within classrooms (multiple countries);
- Continued use of remote (online) learning for students who are not among the first to return to school; and
- Blended learning to create space in school buildings (Denmark, Sweden, Quebec, France).

6. Institute testing for all students, teachers, and staff who return to school, once per week, and institute contact tracing protocols.

One of the greatest failures by the United States in responding to COVID-19 has been the failure to provide plentiful and reliable testing for the virus. Widespread testing of students, teachers, and staff would reduce if not eliminate many obstacles and public health burdens in returning to school. Not knowing if children are infected makes it difficult for schools to reopen safely, many experts say. Scarce data on whether infected children—including those without symptoms—easily spread the disease to others complicates the issue, said Dr. Jeffrey Shaman, a Columbia University infectious disease specialist.²⁰

Returning to schools should require the school district to regularly test students and staff for the coronavirus, said Los Angeles School Superintendent Austin Beutner. And Beutner says it would be “equally important” for the district to trace individuals who have come into contact with someone who has the virus. Los Angeles has seen an increase in COVID infections, but testing should be available in all districts in all states. Beutner estimated that it would cost about \$300 per student over the course of a school year to test every student and staff member each week, and said those dollars “pale in comparison” to the importance of reopening schools. “The federal government could help by providing the funding schools need to make it safe and appropriate for students and staff to return,” he said.²¹

“To combat this virus, we need to test widely and frequently, and get the results back quickly,” said Dr. Zev Williams at Columbia University, who is developing a coronavirus spit test that can run in about 30 minutes. “That requires a genuine paradigm shift in the way we go about testing for it.”²²

Once scaled up and distributed, faster tests could be used in hospitals to quickly screen emergency room patients. Schools and workplaces could buy them to monitor the health of children and employees. With additional work, some tests could be developed to yield a positive or negative result in the comfort of a person’s home.²³

“The quicker and easier tests can be done,” the more ubiquitous they can be, said Dr. Amesh Adalja at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security. “That’s going to help people get back to some semblance of normalcy.”²⁴

“Federal officials have recently suggested students need to be in school and, like a Nike ad, told educators ‘Just Do It,’” Beutner said.

“We all know the best place for students to learn is in a school setting. While Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz might have said, ‘Tap your heels together three times and say, There’s no place like home,’ and you’ll be there, actually returning to schools is not so simple. The Federal government could help by providing the funding schools need to make it safe and appropriate for students and staff to return. The cost of testing all at schools, maybe \$15 billion, will help make it safer for all 50 million students and their teachers in public schools across the country.”²⁵



MORE SPECIFICS FOR THE PROTECTION OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS:

I. SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING IS THE TOP PRIORITY

Any plan to return Connecticut's students, teachers, and staff to school must make safety the very top priority in order to avoid a resurgence of the virus in our state.

- We have seen the tragic outcome in other states when all stakeholders—not just schools—do not help shoulder the burden of avoidable health consequences.
- The purpose of a school is to educate students. Meeting the responsibility of both education in school and caring for children outside of school requires the partnership of many throughout the community.
- Employers must be part of the solution by providing flexible schedules for employees that accommodate school schedules and assisting wherever possible by providing or subsidizing before- and after-school options.
- A workable plan must connect partners and community support in a collaboration where all—not just our schools—share in meeting the varied and important responsibilities to our children.

II. FOUNDATIONS OF THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

A. Safety of students and staff first

Schools cannot reopen without strict district compliance with the requirements of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state and local public health officials, including access to testing, PPE, and a continuing decline in virus infection rates and hospitalization.

B. Funding equity

In a pandemic, schools must have the resources necessary to provide for the safety of all students and educators while the education of students takes place. The state must ensure that no district lacks funding necessary for COVID-related expenses and equitable access to education. The state must also be prepared to provide support to rectify remote learning inequities, including lack of laptops, tablets, and Internet access for all students and teachers.

C. Equity lens for all issues

Issues and responses to COVID-19 should be reviewed through the following questions:

- Who will benefit from the choices and decisions being made, and who will be harmed?
- Are we explicitly addressing racial and economic disparities and/or impacts?
- As to planning and decision-making, now and ongoing into the school year, whose voices have been heard?

D. Protections for at-risk students and staff

COVID-19 disproportionately affects older adults, and all those with underlying chronic health conditions. Reopening plans must provide these workers with the option to deliver instruction remotely to students who will be learning remotely or to students who are in the building under the supervision of qualified staff. At-risk students should have a similar option to learn remotely while their teachers and peers are in school.

E. Assess impacts on racial and economic inequities

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare existing racial and economic disparities in this country. At each stage of reopening implementation, racial and social justice must be at the forefront. Given the resources needed to respond to the virus—including PPE, infrastructure changes, staff, revised work hours, deep cleaning and sanitization, personal protective equipment (PPE), and technology-related needs—it is critical that underresourced schools receive the resources they require.

F. Cooperative school district planning and oversight process

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have a dramatic impact on teachers' conditions of employment. Bargaining must remain the bedrock of decision-making, and discussions to resolve issues regarding safety, working conditions, and responsibilities will be important to a smooth reopening. In addition, local school reopening committees should include teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, parent representatives, a school health representative, and the presidents of local bargaining organizations. Committees need to evaluate the unique needs and capacities for their districts and make appropriate choices as to models for returning to school and combining in-class education with remote learning.

G. Prepare for flexible access to education—both in the classroom with safety protocols, and through remote learning

While we hope to avoid a second wave of the virus in Connecticut, we must be prepared with a robust remote learning plan for those students with health risks, and if circumstances require full-time remote learning.

III. SPECIFIC SAFETY ISSUES THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED BY LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A. Compliance with wearing masks and safety protocols

- The success of any return to school will depend on consistent adherence to safety protocols by students and adults. School administrators must inform parents of the protocols necessary before their children are able to return to school.
- To protect the health of all in school, safety protocols must be a requirement, not an option. Healthy learning and adherence to safety protocols require an ongoing, school-wide effort and partnership with parents; this cannot be left to teachers to explain and enforce.

B. Transportation and building entry issues

- School transportation vehicles should be limited in capacity in order to allow CDC social distancing guidelines.
- There must be a thorough cleaning of the vehicles in between routes.
- In addition to the driver, buses must have a monitor on each route to oversee proper social distancing and mask wearing, so that the driver can concentrate on safely driving.
- The plan for student entry into the school should limit the density among and between students as they leave the bus and enter the school, as well as at the end of the school day as they leave the school.

C. School district healthcare monitoring and protection protocols

- Access to COVID-19 testing for students and staff.
- Screen students and employees upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure.
- Procedure for contact logging, and contact tracing where necessary.
- Provide masks and other needed PPE to all educators and students.
- Density reduction throughout the school to meet public health guidelines.
- An inspection protocol conducted by teachers to ensure that their classroom meets a minimum six-foot separation of students.
- A 'no visitor' policy to minimize the spread of the virus.



D. Response to confirmed cases or exposure to the virus

- Protocols outlining COVID testing procedures must be ready for returning students and staff after infection/exposure.
- Certification to SDE that school nurses have been hired for each school, and a ‘waiting room’ with appropriate protocols and safeguards is available for symptomatic individuals.
- Educators who have been exposed to the virus and must quarantine will not lose any sick leave.

E. Improvements to air quality and sanitization

- Assurances that windows can be opened to improve air flow, and that air handlers are working and have been thoroughly cleaned.
- Handwashing/sanitizing stations distributed throughout the building, properly maintained, and stocked throughout the school day.
- Adequate sanitizing and disinfecting supplies for all schools; when students enter or leave their classrooms, they should have disinfecting wipes to prepare their desk/chair space for use.

F. Other supports from local school districts

- Recruitment of qualified additional substitute teachers and paraprofessionals.
- Protocols for utilizing remote learning and counseling for those traumatized students who are a danger to themselves or others in the in-class school setting.
- Providing opportunities for at-risk teachers to be assigned to remote learning in place of in-class learning.

G. CEA will work with education stakeholders on the following

Stress the need for partnerships with others in the community—such as employers—as described in this plan, to help create or subsidize safe, high-quality childcare.

- Stress the need for the state of Connecticut to oversee safe, high-quality childcare centers, especially in underresourced communities.
- Partner with the governor and other stakeholders to ensure that funding is provided by the state for Connecticut’s schools and all COVID-related expenses, state childcare centers, technology (laptops, tablets, Internet providers), and resources needed in underresourced schools and communities.
- Add additional social workers and school counselors to schools, especially in under-resourced schools and communities.
- Suspend standardized testing.

H. Adopt robust support services and protections for students and employees

- Train staff in trauma-informed practices.
- Monitor and support students upon their return to school for signs of food and housing insecurity, domestic violence or abuse at home, or grief and trauma due to the pandemic.
- Assure that Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are robust and easy to access, including benefits related to mental health and substance-abuse disorders.
- Provide whistleblower protections to guarantee that education employees and contractors working in schools are protected against retaliation for reporting or raising concerns about workplace safety with respect to COVID-19, whether they discuss those concerns with fellow employees, their employer, government agencies, the public, or the news media.
- Anticipate a second wave of illness and plan for remote operations and alternative assignments if schools are once again forced to physically close in whole or in part.



IV. UPGRADE SCHOOL HVAC SYSTEMS AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY AND SAFETY

Improve or replace deficient HVAC systems, improve air filtration and purification systems, and install air conditioning with state funding support—these are critical to the safety of students and staff.

- Schools are similar to cruise ships and hotels in terms of shared ecosystems; the HVAC system controlling air flow and air quality is crucial.
- Professional evaluation of every school HVAC system, with state support to improve air filtration and purification.
- Improve climate controls in all schools as to temperature and humidity—year round—to provide safer and healthier learning conditions. This is particularly important during the beginning and end of the regular school year, when high temperatures and humidity create additional health problems.

V. STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has created daunting challenges for ensuring the continuity of education and school-based services. Prolonged school closures have resulted in lost instructional time and learning under less-than-optimal circumstances. These challenges are particularly acute for the most vulnerable students.

A. Accessibility for students with disabilities

- Consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parents, students and the educational system must collaborate on the best steps to remediate students' needs and comply with IEP requirements in person where possible, and through remote learning where necessary.
- Provide additional PPE protections and para-educator help for teachers and staff working with special education populations that require close contact.



B. Professional development

- Professional development and planning time for teachers is more important than ever.
- Professional development should not only include relevant content but also address teaching safely in the COVID-19 environment.
- Professional development should focus on strategies to promote student engagement during times of remote learning, enhance students' social and emotional skills, and incorporate trauma-informed strategies, especially given the impact of COVID-19 on children in all grades.

C. Community schools

- All public schools should build on the community school model that incorporates community allies and support systems for students and families.
- Create or expand collaborative partnerships and access to community resources that students and families need, including meals, medical care, job training and employment counseling, housing assistance, and other social services.

D. Limit standardized testing to teacher-identified diagnostics that assist learning

- The COVID-19 crisis has brought attention to the fundamentals of education—critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, and engagement, all of which are not fairly or equitably represented in standardized testing.
- Connecticut should focus the limited education time on the content of student learning.
- Diagnostic testing should be teacher-friendly and accompanied by access to relevant instructional resources and supports.

E. Continue suspension of inappropriate teacher evaluation plans

- Connecticut should develop new expectations for instruction.
- Informal coaching focused on helpful feedback should continue.

F. Provide essential student health and developmental support

- Monitor the caseloads of nurses, social workers, counselors, psychologists, occupational, speech, and physical therapists, special education teachers and managers, and other specialized instructional support personnel to ensure that their caseloads are appropriate.
- Where necessary, provide more staffing to meet student needs.

G. Use data appropriately

- In addition to refocusing schools on the fundamental values of public schooling—a focus that has been lost over the years—it is also time to repurpose the role of data in our schools.
- As we reopen our schools, we should use data to guide instruction as well as identify and share best practices, and protect student data and privacy from non-educational or commercial interests.



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