



For Immediate Release

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As COVID-19 Cases Spike, Education Community Urges State to Shift to All Remote Learning Unless Stronger Protections Are in Place

“Safe and Successful Schools Now” report outlines immediate steps necessary to keep students, educators, staff, and communities safe

With the surging COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) infection rate — the highest since May — consistent statewide safety protocols must be established and strictly enforced, along with uniform transparency in reporting and responding to cases, for schools. If that’s not possible, Connecticut must shift to full-time remote learning until after the holidays. Those are some of the required statewide steps outlined in the Board of Education (BOE) Union Coalition’s “Safe and Successful Schools Now,” report released today.

Seven of eight counties across Connecticut are reporting COVID-19 cases at levels that state guidance says should require hybrid or remote learning, yet many schools continue with full-time in-person classes. Dozens of schools are quarantining hundreds of students and employees or closing with little notice.

- “The dramatic rise in COVID-19 cases raises safety concerns for students,” said CEA President Jeff Leake. “The Center for Disease Control says schools are not the safest place during the pandemic, and in-person learning is a high-risk activity. The state must take steps now to strengthen safety or else move to all distance learning as we brace for this second wave of the virus.”
- “Every district has a different, inconsistent process to respond to Coronavirus cases,” said Donald Williams, CEA executive director. “We need strict, statewide oversight and assurances that districts are uniformly following the health and safety procedures established by the CDC and SDE, because right now, they are not.”
- “We applaud those school officials who have worked in partnership with their employees and placed a high priority on health and safety,” said Jan Hochadel, AFT Connecticut’s president. “Too many have fallen short on both counts, so more must be done immediately. It just makes sense to proactively close buildings rather than have students endure constant disruptions and upheaval.”
- “In-person, classroom learning is best for our students, but only when safe,” said Jody Barr, executive director of AFSCME Council 4. “The state’s COVID-19 numbers

demonstrate it's not safe. We need strict, statewide protocols, remote learning where that is not possible, and a commitment to keep all school staff on the job.”

While the governor has increased protections such as allowing only 50% capacity in venues such as restaurants, there are no similar protections for schools.

- “The Education Coalition is asking the governor and the state department of education for consistency in handling cases in our public schools,” said Mike Holmes, servicing representative of UAW Region 9A Local 376. “Our students, teachers, and staff deserve to be protected to the same degree as all Connecticut residents.”
- “Between infections and quarantines some of our schools are operating with half the normal staffing levels,” said CSEA/SEIU, Local 2001 2001 Paraprofessional Council President, Cynthia Ross-Zweig. “We’re all working hard to guarantee the safety and emotional well-being of students, but there’s only so much we can do when we are this short-staffed. School districts need to be more transparent about the impact of infections and quarantines, and when infection rates are high schools need move to remote learning. Safety must be the first consideration.”

The “Safe and Successful Schools Now” report highlights scientific evidence that shows that children contract and spread the virus while often remaining asymptomatic and undetected. Children with COVID-19 are asymptomatic between 15% to 40% of the time—that’s why regular testing of all students is important for identifying and controlling the spread of the virus.

- “We must ensure that strict safety measures and protocols are being followed in our schools, including six feet of social distancing at all times, proper ventilation, cleaning, mask wearing, and transparency in the reporting of COVID-19 cases,” said Carl Chisem, MEUI/SEUI Local 506 president. “We must protect students, staff and their families. Where that is not possible schools should move to all distance learning.”

The “Safe and Successful Schools Now” report provides specific steps to strengthen and enforce protocols to keep our education communities safe.

- **COVID-19 case notification:** Districts must make public, within 24 hours, COVID-19 incidents by school building (including positive cases and the number of those exposed and quarantining) and immediately forward the information to SDE for inclusion in the state’s COVID-19 school dashboard. The state website should have a continuing tally of COVID-19 cases per school district, by school building, and the number of individuals—delineated by staff and students—who need to quarantine.
- **Increase reporting on state dashboard:** The state dashboard should include a list of schools that are closed due to COVID-19 and for how long. Districts that publicize COVID-19 incidents that could be used as partial models include
 - Fairfield: <https://www.fairfieldschools.org/>
 - Glastonbury: <https://www.glastonburyus.org/district-info/coronavirusreopening>
 - Stamford: <https://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/district/covid-19-school-reopening-information>

- Middletown: <https://sites.google.com/mpsct.org/re-entry/home>
- **COVID-19 notice to employees:** Provide notice within 24 hours to all employees, their exclusive association representatives (if any), and employers of subcontracted employees who were on the premises who were potentially exposed to COVID-19.
- **Teacher and staff input for contact tracing:** Ensure that teachers and bargaining unit representatives who are selected by their association are included on local committees or entities that decide who requires contact tracing and/or quarantining in the aftermath of a positive COVID-19 case.
- **Establish consistent statewide protocols in schools for:** 1) reporting and public notification of positive COVID-19 cases; 2) contact tracing and quarantines; 3) social distancing; 4) COVID-19 testing; and 5) PPE availability.
 - Require that social distancing standards are strictly followed, not compromised, and not required only “where possible.”
 - If a test-positive person is identified as having spent a day in a particular classroom, the entire class must be quarantined, not just those closest to the person.
 - There must be a single statewide length of a quarantine. (for example, is the day of exposure day one of the quarantine, or is it day zero? Both practices exist).
 - Contact tracing must include classroom staff when a classroom is impacted.
 - No educators or school staff who must quarantine shall be required to use sick leave (which they may need if they get sick), but rather shall receive quarantine pay or be allowed to teach their students remotely.
 - Schools, with state assistance, must provide regular COVID-19 testing of students and staff to check for both symptomatic and asymptomatic cases.
- **Meet standards or go remote after holidays:** All schools should go fully remote after Thanksgiving (November 30) through Martin Luther King Day (January 18) to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 after the holidays, unless the statewide standards in this document are implemented and schools are fully staffed.
- **Red zone districts must reduce density or go remote:** Towns in red zones must, at a minimum, reduce density and be in “hybrid” mode or go to full remote education, unless the statewide standards in this document are implemented and schools are fully staffed.
- **Provide adequate planning time:** Institute mandatory planning time—an additional hour of planning time per day or one day per week for planning only.
- **Phase out dual teaching setting:** Teachers should either teach remotely or in-person, but not both at the same time. Until dual settings are phased out, provide 1.5 hours of planning time per day to help manage dual teaching settings.
- **Continue payment and prohibition of layoffs:** Continue the Governor’s Order to protect the continued employment of all public school staff who are directly employed by the local or regional board of educations, including but not limited to teachers,

paraprofessionals and other support staff, cafeteria, clerical, transportation, and custodial staff.

- **Institute a moratorium on annual standardized testing:** For the 2020-2021 school year.
- **Cleaning plan and statewide protocols:** The State Department of Public Health must create a cleaning plan for all school districts to use, with a checklist for specific tasks.
- **Require schools to keep and post cleaning logs:** Logs are required to be kept by restaurants and other entities, and should also be required in schools.
- **Fix inadequate ventilation systems:** HVAC systems in all schools shall be inspected by December 31 and upgraded where necessary to minimize the spread of COVID-19 droplets.

Educators have a lot to contribute and these steps focus on what's best for everyone. Despite the unprecedented challenges of this pandemic, educators and school staff work to ensure that students keep learning and stay engaged. They must be allowed to participate in any decision-making that impacts safety in the classroom for them, their students, and their families.

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The Board of Education Union Coalition represents over 60,000 unionized public education employees across the state and includes members of CEA, AFTCT, SEBAC, CSEA, MEUI, AFSCME, and UAW.