

PLAN TO PROTECT
OUR SCHOOLS:
**SAFE AND
SUCCESSFUL
SCHOOLS NOW**

NOVEMBER 2020



In the face of dramatic increases in COVID-19 infections, Connecticut must establish, maintain, and rigidly enforce consistent statewide safety protocols for schools and require uniform transparency in reporting and responding to COVID-19 cases. If that

is not possible, Connecticut must shift to full-time remote learning. In order to ensure that in-person classes can be held safely, it is critical that we use every tool in the toolbox to protect the health of students, staff, and their families.

Statements such as “schools are the safest place to be” are not accurate. To date, there has not been adequate testing of students and staff to determine the spread and scope of COVID-19 infections within Connecticut schools. In addition to the community spread that occurred under Phase 3, the increasing infection rate in Connecticut is due in part to the reopening of schools.

“I don’t believe that the transition to Phase 3 was the initial cause of the second wave, although it was likely a contributing factor,” said Pedro Mendes, of UConn’s Center for Quantitative Medicine. “My conclusion is that the reopening of schools was possibly the first factor that started the wave. That increase then picked up speed around October 24, which then means Phase 3 also contributed to this wave, but did not start it.”¹

Scientific evidence shows that children with COVID-19 shed the virus at significantly higher levels than adults, and they can be effective spreaders of the virus.² As a result, it is essential to test all students—not just those exhibiting symptoms—because students with COVID-19 are asymptomatic up to 40 percent of the time, and can spread the virus.³ “We are driving with the headlights off, and we’ve got kids in the car,” said Melinda Buntin, chair of the Department of Health Policy at Vanderbilt School of Medicine, who has argued that in-person education requires proper monitoring, testing and precautions.

School districts must not be dissuaded by the state from proactively going to remote

Connecticut must move all schools to remote learning, or create and enforce statewide protections for any in-class education

education when infection rates increase or positive COVID-19 cases occur in schools. Public health experts agree that more must be done to make schools safer from the spread of COVID-19, including regular COVID-19 testing of students—and

not just those with symptoms; consistent and rapid contact tracing; availability of masks and protective equipment; enforcement of mask wearing, cohorting, cleaning, and six feet of social distancing; and transparency in the reporting of COVID-19 cases.

The following steps are required statewide to secure our schools in the face of increased COVID-19 infections:

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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>
- ◆ Provide notice within 24 hours to all employees, their exclusive association/unions representatives (if any), and employers of subcontracted employees who were on the premises who were potentially exposed to COVID-19.

- ◆ Ensure that teachers and bargaining unit representatives who are selected by their association/unions are included on local health 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 and school transportation 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 simply followed “when 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 practice of establishing the length of a quarantine. (Is the day of exposure day one of the quarantine, or is it day zero? Both practices exist).
 - Contact tracing must systematically 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.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Institute mandatory planning time: an additional hour of planning time per day or one day per week for planning only.
- ◆ Phase out dual teaching settings: 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.
- ◆ Continued payment and prohibition against layoffs through the end of the current school year of all public school staff who are directly employed by the local or regional board of education, including but not limited to teachers, paraprofessionals and other support staff, and staff or contractual employees for cafeteria, clerical, transportation, and custodial support.
- ◆ Institute a moratorium on annual standardized testing for the rest of the 2020-2021 school year.
- ◆ 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 should also be required in schools.
- ◆ HVAC systems in all schools shall be inspected by December 31 and upgraded where necessary to minimize the spread of COVID-19 droplets.

¹ <https://www.middletownpress.com/middletown/article/Analysis-How-schools-and-Phase-3-contributed-to-15723735.php>

² <https://www.technologynetworks.com/immunology/news/largest-covid-19-tracing-study-to-date-finds-children-are-key-spreaders-341122>

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/08/looking-at-children-as-the-silent-spreaders-of-sars-cov-2/>

<https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/09/30/largest-covid-19-contact-tracing-study-date-finds-children-key-spread-evidence>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/health/coronavirus-asymptomatic-transmission.html>

<https://kmp.com/news/local/medical-experts-warn-over-asymptomatic-presymptomatic-covid-spread>