



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Response to COVID-19 Protocols and Outbreaks—New Survey of CEA and AFT-CT Teachers Shows Huge Concerns Regarding Equity and Safety

Hazards of surging infection rates in most communities throughout the state;
Pitfalls of simultaneously teaching in-person and distance learners;
Teachers call for all-remote learning through mid-January

A [new CEA/AFT Connecticut survey](#) of more than 4,000 educators clearly shows that in the midst of a pandemic, schools are not the safest place for children or educators.

- COVID-19 safety guidelines and protocols on reporting and contact tracing vary widely from district to district and sometimes school to school, with the most significant concerns in urban districts.
- School districts and local health departments face a myriad of challenges, including inadequate ventilation systems, a lack of transparency and consistency in COVID-19 reporting, contact tracing, and safety protocols.
- In-person learning combined with inadequate safety measures and high COVID positivity rates have educators worried about the health of their students, families, colleagues, and themselves.
- Nearly half of teachers are required to teach both in-person in the classroom, and to students remotely at home, which is unsustainable and negatively impacts student learning.

“Educators want the same thing everyone else does—for the pandemic to be over,” said CEA President Jeff Leake. “They want to be back with their students, safely teaching in the classroom, but we are not there yet. Experts predict it’s going to be a difficult winter. Cases are expected to increase before we see a decline and before a vaccine becomes widely available.”

“The whole process has been extremely difficult on educators, who are concerned about getting sick and spreading the virus to their families,” said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. “Many are also concerned about not being able to do their best because they are stressed, pushed beyond their limits, left with little or no planning time. That’s especially true for those forced to teach both in-person and remotely at the same time. This survey highlights the need to move to remote learning through mid-January if the virus continues to spread and further jeopardize the safety of our communities.”

Highlights of the survey include:

- More than half of educators (58%) do not feel safe in their school buildings and are concerned about contracting the virus (66% in urban districts, 57% in non-urban districts).
- More than two-thirds (69%) say schools are not the safest places for children during the pandemic (82% in urban districts, 68% in non-urban districts).
- More than 8 in 10 teachers (86% elementary, 91% middle school, 87% high school) believe teaching should be all remote for at least one week after the holiday break to limit the spread of the virus.
- Half of educators do not want students to come back into the classroom during the pandemic (59% urban districts and 50% non-urban districts). The number also varies by grade level: 41% elementary school, 55% middle school, and 60% high school.
- Nearly half (49%) of educators are delivering in-person and remote instruction simultaneously. Among both urban and non-urban teachers, nearly 3 out of 4 (74%) say it negatively impacts student learning.
- The majority of educators say remote learning is effective (14% very effective, 76% somewhat effective).
- Nearly all teachers (98%) reported at least one positive COVID-19 case in their school.
 - 85% said individuals were quarantined (77% urban district, 86% non-urban district).
 - 21% said the school moved to all-distance learning (12% urban district, 22% non-urban district).
 - 16% said nothing was done (23% urban district, 15% non-urban district).
- Nearly half (47%) said not enough was being done when a positive case is confirmed (69% in urban districts, 45% in non-urban districts).
- Nearly half (48%) said their district is not being transparent with contact tracing and reporting outbreaks (79% in urban districts, 45% in non-urban districts).
- More than 9 out of 10 teachers have a higher workload than before the pandemic. Statewide, 44% are working an additional nine hours or more each week.
- Teachers said teaching during COVID is extremely stressful, rating it an 8.42 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- When it comes to how to handle snow days, teachers are split between teaching remotely and having a snow day. A larger percentage of high school (43%) and middle school (40%) teachers want to teach remotely during snow days, compared with elementary school teachers (28%).
- Despite continued calls for mitigation strategies and social distancing, the majority of schools do not provide 6 feet of distance between students in classrooms.
 - Nearly three-quarters (70%) report students are less than six feet apart; nearly half (45%) report students are three feet apart or less.
 - Seventy percent of teachers in urban districts and 60% in non-urban districts say ventilation is a problem, making their school buildings unsafe during the pandemic.
 - More than half (54%) of teachers in urban districts and nearly half (46%) in non-urban districts say allowing local health departments rather than the state to oversee and set COVID-19 protocols and contact tracing puts them at greater risk.
- In order to keep educators safe, nearly 9 in 10 believe the vaccine should be available to them in Phase 1-b, and 91% say special education teachers and paraprofessionals who

work directly with special education students, and educators at high-risk, should be among the first in Phase 1-b of educators to receive the vaccine.

- The majority of educators (76%) plan to get vaccinated when the vaccine is made available (69% in urban districts, 77% in non-urban districts).
 - Many of those who do not plan to get vaccinated or are unsure cite health concerns, including allergies and pregnancy.

While dozens of schools have taken proactive steps to move to all-distance learning through mid-January, our state remains a patchwork of partially opened districts, hybrid, and fully remote learning. Without a clear, consistent, statewide plan, schools are making decisions on a daily basis that disrupt routines and schedules for students, teachers, and families, adding to the trauma, stress, and anxiety already rampant in our communities.

In November, CEA, AFT Connecticut and their allies in the board of education unions coalition released the [Safe and Successful Schools Now](#) plan, with specific recommendations to improve safety. These recommendations need to be implemented now.

“We urge the state to listen to the concerns of educators, follow the science and guidelines it has established, and move to all-distance learning through the holidays, and at least to the middle of January, to prevent further spread of the virus,” said Leake. “Educators, students and their parents deserve nothing less.”

Here are some of the comments from educators who participated in the survey:

- *Teaching during the pandemic and adapting to constant changes and demands is taking a toll on students and teachers.*
- *This situation has been stressful and unrealistic. Teachers are expected to adapt to constant changes and demands that are unusually difficult, including balancing students in class and remotely when they are quarantined.*
- *The contact tracing program is questionable, and many colleagues have shared that they feel it is inaccurate and deceptive. I am immunocompromised and fear for my health and safety every day.*
- *I got COVID. The teacher who works with me in the same room was never asked to quarantine. She wouldn't have even known unless I told her. Zero contact tracing, and no one came to do a deep cleaning of my room.*
- *I am immunocompromised, and my employer refuses to honor my doctor's recommendations.*
- *My husband is also a teacher. He contracted COVID. We don't know where or how but suspect school. He gave it to me. Requests to work remotely were flat-out refused despite doctor recommendations.*
- *Guidelines are constantly changing. It is unclear what symptoms students should be sent home for.*
- *The stress is hard, I had COVID myself, and the recovery time is not enough with the 14 days. The elementary students cannot sit all day, and being three feet apart in the classroom is not far enough.*
- *Not enough planning time, teaching remote and in person simultaneously, very little support, social distancing not happening. Kids' desks are three feet apart—not six, as everyone thinks they are in school.*
- *Very stressful and feel disposable and undervalued*

- *The case numbers are so high in both the town and county, but it seems the data is ignored and we continue to be all in, full-time.*
- *High stress, high anxiety*
- *I feel scared*
- *Impossible to keep up with both the livestream at-home learners and in-person. Constantly running between the computers and having different technology problems daily.*
- *I'm in classrooms of 20 or more students every day, fearing for my safety as the town COVID rate continues to rise daily. I have a partner at home with significant health challenges whom I fear for each day. Our school changes model and schedule so often it is impossible to plan cohesively. We are being asked to record lessons or livestream classes for students out on quarantine while continuing in-person instruction.*
- *Teaching in person students and voluntary distance learners synchronously is a daunting task; it's tough to juggle both. When I'm focused on in-person learners, I feel as though I'm ignoring my distance learners and vice versa.*
- *At least 1/3 of my team has been in and out of quarantine. The inconsistency of this has created a massive amount of preparation with minimal time in the day to do so. Also, students are receiving an inequitable education due to this.*
- *There are discrepancies in technologies, inconsistencies in reporting, and minimal time to plan and prepare.*
- *Cases and exposures are spiking. I feel less safe than I did in September. Social distancing is difficult, only 3 ft apart. Now that it is getting cold, it is harder to get outside for a mask break.*
- *Teaching both in-class and remote students is exhausting, as it is not possible to manage and support both with any integrity.*
- *It's been a struggle. There is so much uncertainty day to day. Also, I feel unsafe being in school.*
- *I am terrified of contracting COVID because it is impossible to keep a 6-foot distance with 20 people in my classroom.*
- *I have had 2 positive cases in my class. This is my second time having to quarantine.*
- *We are short-staffed every single day due to staff and students getting COVID and quarantines. We do not have support staff for students who require support because we are short staffed. The daily cases are not always being reported to staff and families. Teachers are being expected to teach when sick with COVID.*
- *I don't feel safe in small, unventilated room with 19 students.*
- *It is very difficult to meet the needs of my virtual learners while also teaching and planning for 17 in-person students.*
- *We keep switching from in-person to full virtual to hybrid to virtual again. The lack of consistency is slowing student growth and confusing them and their parents. We are changing biweekly at this point.*
- *I contracted COVID from my school and gave it to my family members. So, five people were affected because my district thought it was ok to stay open during this crisis.*
- *Being in the classroom is like playing Russian roulette.*
- *I'm pregnant, so I'm terrified! I also live with my mother, who is elderly.*
- *Due to the gatherings during the holidays, my concerns about safety are strongly impacted. We should be working remotely until after the holiday season.*
- *I currently am in quarantine due to getting COVID from an asymptomatic student.*

- *I wasn't made aware that a student that I was exposed to had COVID prior to Thanksgiving, even though that student had been absent for days. I was notified to quarantine the Sunday after spending Thanksgiving with my immediate family. During that next quarantine week, I began showing signs of COVID, and I tested positive by the end of the week.*
- *I was feeling good about in-person teaching, as our district cases were only 6 by mid-October. However, 2 weeks later our cases shot to 76. I wish the district would have changed to distance learning at the time. I have since contracted COVID-19 from school.*
- *I am on unpaid leave due to my elderly, very compromised parents who live with me. There is little ability to social distance in my art room.*
- *I am a pregnant teacher who works closely with high-needs students who do not follow social distancing.*

Over 4,000 educators responded to the survey, which was administered Dec. 14-17, 2020. The survey can be found at cea.org and aftct.org

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The Connecticut Education Association is Connecticut's largest teachers' union, representing active and retired educators across the state. Visit cea.org or follow us on Twitter @ceanews and on Facebook at CTEdAssoc.

AFT Connecticut represents approximately 30,000 professionals across the state, including PreK-12 teachers, paraeducators and education support personnel in 32 local and regional school districts. Visit aftct.org or follow the labor federation on Twitter at @AFTCT and on Facebook at AFT Connecticut.