

COVID-19 Request for Governor Lamont

January 8, 2021

From: CEA, AFTCT, SEBAC, CSEA, MEUI, AFSCME, and UAW

We are calling on Governor Lamont to order a clear, uniform policy in Connecticut regarding how to manage the effect of COVID-19 on quarantine and leave in our schools, through a Governor's Order with two provisions. Specifically the order should include:

- 1. School Districts must accommodate any educator and school staff willing and able to work remotely due to a health condition, while under quarantine, or when needing to care for a child at home.**

This is necessary to support Commissioner Miguel Cardona's recommendation in correspondence dated November 2, 2020.

Many districts have irresponsibly disregarded the Commissioner's recommendations when compliance with FFCRA leave policy became voluntary after December 31, 2020. This clearly demonstrates the need for a mandate to ensure a consistent, uniform standard that protects health and safety.

Commissioner Cardona stated the following on November 2, 2020:

"Staff members may be unable to continue in-person employment—whether due to their own health condition, a recommendation for quarantine, or the need to care for a child whose school or daycare is closed due to the pandemic. Continuity of access to teachers with whom the child is familiar, including consistent paraeducators support, is crucial for the success of our students."

"One way to support student access is to grant flexibility to the greatest extent feasible to any staff member willing and able to work remotely while under quarantine. Another is to ensure that our hourly staff, such as paraeducators, are being offered as many hours as possible, even if it means allowing some of that work to happen remotely. If public health data requires fully remote instruction, these existing staff members can provide daily contact to students to provide the social emotional and the academic support needed."

"If public health data requires fully remote instruction, these existing staff members can provide daily contact to students to provide the social emotional and the academic support needed. School districts should continue their focus on retaining connections with students during the pandemic by reimagining employee work to support students' educational needs."

A statewide mandate is necessary because recent actions show that districts cannot be trusted to "do the right thing." When given the choice whether to continue with responsible leave policy during a pandemic—after mandatory protections expired on December 31, 2020—their legal counsel has advised that districts shamefully deny educators the

opportunity to either perform their duties remotely, or continue receiving their salary. Here are excerpts of a letter sent to educators in various districts in recent days:

“Anyone who is subject to a quarantine outside of being advised to self-isolate (quarantine) by the _____ Public Schools as a result of a COVID-19 related event within the _____ Public Schools will no longer qualify for paid leave. If an employee is subject to quarantine, for example, because of an exposure outside of the workplace (e.g., through a family member or friend), that employee does not qualify for paid leave after December 31, 2020.

Anyone advised by a healthcare provider to self-quarantine because of issues related to COVID-19 will no longer qualify for paid leave on that basis alone.

Anyone caring for a child whose school or place of care is closed (or child care provider is unavailable) for reasons related to COVID-19 will no longer be eligible for paid leave after December 31, 2020.

The proposed governor’s order, above, would reverse these irresponsible and punitive changes in policy and continue remote teaching/leave for educators.

In addition, the public health protections of previous COVID-19 orders should be continued through the current school and fiscal year, through the following Governor’s Order:

- 2. Extension of COVID-19 Executive Orders to June 30, 2021. Pursuant to the emergency declarations issued on September 1, 2020, all executive orders issued pursuant to the public health and civil preparedness emergencies declared on March 10, 2020 and renewed on September 1, 2020 (COVID-19 Orders), and extended through February 9, 2021, that are unexpired and currently in effect as of the date of this order are hereby extended through June 30, 2021, unless earlier modified or terminated by me. Any individual section of any such order that is scheduled to expire on any other specific date shall remain in effect until such specific date, and any specific effective date or date for action contained in any such individual section shall remain valid.**

This extension would include Governor’s Order 7R, which supports Commissioner Cardona’s recommendation that “school leaders are also reminded to consult with their board counsel because the CARES Act requires that school districts ‘to the greatest extent practicable, continue to pay its employees and contractors’ while school is disrupted by the pandemic.’ While this is important due to the attestation school districts made under the CARES Act to access funding, it is most essential because our students’ success will require creative reimagining of all supports available.”

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