



## For Immediate Release

Dec. 10, 2020

### **Board of Education Union Coalition Leaders Present Petitions to the Governor to Adopt the Safe and Successful Schools Now Recommendations**

**HARTFORD** – As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Connecticut and across the country, leaders of the Board of Education Union Coalition today presented a petition signed by nearly 14,000 education and community members urging the state to take immediate steps to protect the health of students, staff and communities.

Speaking at a press conference held on the North Steps of the State Capitol, union leaders said they will share the petitions, which were signed by teachers, paraeducators, bus drivers and monitors, counselors, custodians, cafeteria workers, parents, community members and other education supporters, with Gov. Ned Lamont.

Union coalition leaders said the petitions reinforce the urgency of their months-long campaign for safe and healthy schools. They said the surging COVID-19 infection rate demands the establishment and enforcement of consistent statewide safety protocols, 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.

- “At great risk to themselves and their families, Connecticut’s dedicated educators are going to work every day amid massive COVID outbreaks and unsafe working conditions,” said CEA President Jeff Leake. “With surging infection rates and vaccines for the general public not available until after the new year, the state must shift to full-time remote learning until mid-January to ensure that in-person learning is a safe strategy for our students and teachers—not an experiment, not a gamble.”
- “Students, teachers and support staff are not safer in schools,” said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. “Every time the governor mentions that they are, he loses support and confidence with many of our members and their students’ parents. If schools are safe, why are we constantly in quarantine due to infections and exposures?”
- “Our members are the final defense in ensuring the cleanliness of our schools and the safety of our students,” added Carl Chisem, President CEUI, SEIU Local 511 and MEUI, SEIU Local 506. “Without enforced, universal protocols their responsibilities are that much more difficult to accomplish.”

The union coalition’s petition campaign follows the Nov. 24 release of their report, “Safe and

Successful Schools Now,” which calls for a shift to all remote learning unless stronger protections are in place to keep our school communities safe.

- “To simply keep the doors open without regard to science cannot possibly be in the best interest of our children. Everyone is susceptible, students, staff and our families at home, and unless there are mandatory, consistent and transparent guidelines, we will continue to learn of more cases and deaths,” said Cynthia Ross-Zweig, CSEA Paraeducator Council President.
- “We are asking Governor Lamont to listen to the voices of the people who signed the petitions and to make sure local districts follow our recommendations for safe and successful schools,” said Council 4 Executive Director Jody Barr. “We have a long, hard winter ahead of us. Let’s do right by our students and staff.”
- “The message we are trying to communicate is clear. We are simply asking for statewide standards to be applied equally, across all school districts throughout the entire state,” added Michael Holmes, International Service Representative for the United Auto Workers, Region 9A.

Many of the 14,000 people who signed the petition also provided commentary from the front-lines of public education during a pandemic:

*“My brother contracted COVID at an elementary school. He brought it to my elderly mother who died from it. I am heartbroken as well as terrified.”*

*Cos Cob: “We want schools open, but need consistent protocols and protections.”*

*Waterbury: “The disparity and lack of clarity around COVID response in school districts right now is completely unacceptable.” -Waterbury*

*New Milford: “Transparency is important and contact tracing is important and neither is happening in my school.” –New Milford*

*Northford: “We matter. Our students matter. Our families matter. Protect us.” Northford*

*Branford: “You need to set a state standard so ALL can be safe and still learn.” Branford*

*Mansfield: “With the timing of cold weather and windows being closed, more students being brought into our buildings, gatherings and travel of families during the holiday season, lack of social distancing, and the rapid rise in Covid cases, this feels like a perfect storm. I am in agreement that if testing can't happen, and other appropriate protocols followed, then schools should go remote until after the holidays to at least eliminate some of the risk to staff and students right now.”*

*Manchester: “With the return to full time in person learning, the social distancing has been much more difficult to manage given the increase in numbers. Also, the schools are not being cleaned and sanitized as initially promised.”*

*Old Saybrook: “We have done a wonderful job keeping students in school through the Thanksgiving holiday, however as the numbers increase and towns are moving into the red zone, it is imperative that we take greater measures to keep students, staff, and our families safe.”*

*Ellington: “With groups of 20-25 people in a room at the same time, social distancing cannot be accommodated. I want to work- but I want to work safely. Please support the health of students, educators, paraprofessionals, and all other staff by mandating that schools adhere to protocols that keep us safe.”*

*Ridgefield: “We keep hearing about how safe the schools are yet we’ve had multiple COVID positive cases in the district and are seeing those cases increase every week. Furthermore, protocols for testing and quarantining have been unevenly applied and students are returning to school after a long weekend with large family gatherings, putting their classmates and teachers at risk. I do not feel safe in my building.”*

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

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**Links –**

Map of CT reflecting hometowns of initial 14,000+ signers:

<https://bit.ly/BoEmap>

Board of Education Union Coalition’s “Protect Students, Teachers, and School Staff” petition:

<https://bit.ly/SafeSchoolsNowPetition>

Board of Education Union Coalition’s “Safe and Successful Schools Now” report:

[http://aftct.org/sites/aftct.org/files/boe\\_unions\\_cltn\\_sf\\_schls\\_report.pdf](http://aftct.org/sites/aftct.org/files/boe_unions_cltn_sf_schls_report.pdf)

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