



For Immediate Release:

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Board of Education Union Coalition Calls on Governor to Create Uniform Policy for Managing COVID-19 Quarantines in Schools

Districts' handling of positive cases and quarantines risks health and safety of all residents

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Connecticut and across the country, the Board of Education Union Coalition leaders sent a letter to Governor Ned Lamont outlining the need for a clear, uniform policy regarding how school districts should handle quarantines and leaves in our public schools.

In the letter, Coalition leaders say that too many school districts are not following procedures established by health experts for responding to COVID-19 exposures and are disregarding SDE Commissioner Miguel Cardona's recommendation to accommodate educators' requests to work remotely due to health conditions, quarantine, or the need to care for a child at home. Those districts are jeopardizing the health and safety of their communities and the success of their students.

The Coalition is asking for a uniform statewide policy on school quarantine and leave, citing recent actions that show some districts cannot be trusted to do what is right for their education communities. The letter highlights the fact that many districts are following irresponsible advice from legal counsel--denying educators and staff the opportunity to work remotely and informing those who must quarantine that they are not eligible for paid leave.

"This reckless advice ignores the guidance from public health experts and puts the entire state in jeopardy," said CEA President Jeff Leake. "The governor must move quickly to reject these negligent practices by mandating that school districts take a responsible and not punitive approach to handling quarantines and leaves that do not put public health at risk. Right now, too many educators and staff are being forced to choose between their jobs and their health and are being given the unacceptable option of either teaching in person or taking unpaid leave."

"Our AFSCME union is mourning the loss of Eleanor DeShields, a beloved paraprofessional in Bridgeport who died of COVID-19 last month," said Council 4 Executive Director Jody Barr. "School employees should not have to risk their health and their livelihoods when local districts are unable or unwilling to keep students and staff safe. That's why we're again calling on the state to establish strong and consistent health and safety protocols across every district. It's the least we owe Eleanor and all of the dedicated teachers and support staff our Coalition represents."

“This past spring, our Coalition worked with public education stakeholders to protect school employees from the pandemic’s unintended economic side effects,” said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. “The result was welcome recognition of all those who serve and support Connecticut’s preK-12 students—teachers, paraeducators, social workers, school nurses, counselors, administrative staff, tutors, custodians, and many more. That same spirit of cooperation and commitment is needed again—now more than ever. The last thing we need is for working people to remain unable to support themselves and their families just as we turn the corner on the pandemic.”

"Our members, essential employees tasked with educating children and keeping schools safe and sanitary, are faced daily with the difficult and potentially lifesaving decision to either go to work or remain home. Without uniform statewide protocols for quarantining and paid leave, their decisions may be a choice between unintentionally spreading COVID-19 or being able to provide for their families. This is a decision no one should ever have to make, particularly during a pandemic," added Carl Chisem, President MEUI, SEIU Local 506 and CEUI, SEIU Local 511.

“Our Coalition’s request for consistent application of standards is not unreasonable,” said Mike Holmes, UAW Region 9A Servicing Rep. “Our desire for safe and successful schools is shared equally across all districts, but the lack of uniform guidance is unacceptable. We cannot expect to achieve the same level of safety if we are not equally applying the same protocols.”

The educators’ group is also calling for the public health provisions of previous COVID-19 orders to continue through the end of the school year.

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The Board of Education Union Coalition represents over 60,000 public school employees (teachers and non-certified education personnel) across the state and includes members in the following labor federations and their affiliated unions: AFSCME, AFT Connecticut, CEA, CSEA, SEUI, CEUI, MEUI, and UAW.

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