



## **For Immediate Release:**

February 22, 2021

### **Parallel Vaccination Plan will Provide Benefit to Our School Communities**

*Educators, school staff, superintendents and parents applaud adoption of their proposal for keeping buildings open by prioritizing COVID-19 vaccines*

Unions representing teachers and support personnel, superintendents and parents today are thanking state officials for prioritizing educators and school staff for vaccinations and adopting their proposed parallel vaccination plan presented last week for Connecticut's school communities. The Board of Education (BOE) Union Coalition's recommendations were included in directives announced this afternoon by Governor Ned Lamont. Once implemented, the plan will support students' access to uninterrupted in-person instruction and mitigate the impacts of learning loss due to staff quarantines and related building closures.

"The next phase of vaccines in Connecticut moves our state forward in a sensible and equitable way," said CEA Executive Director Donald Williams. "Prioritizing school and childcare employees makes sense because of the need for safety in our schools, and the benefit students receive from in-class education. Parents appreciate knowing they can go to work while their children are being safely educated."

"This vaccination plan is a literal shot in the arm for students and staff across the state. We can make school-based vaccination clinics work. These clinics have worked for years to inoculate children and adults against the flu; they'll work in the fight against this virus, too," added Cynthia Harris-Jackson, who works as a public health nurse at Conte West Hills Magnet School in New Haven and is president of AFSCME Local 1303-467, the union representing New Haven's public health nurses.

Coalition leaders last week shared their plan with Lamont Administration officials and called for establishing parallel, school-based vaccination clinics in local and regional districts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends minimizing barriers to access and supports administering vaccines at or near workplaces as an optimal strategy.

"We never suggested anyone 'jump the line,'" said Shellye Davis, a paraeducator at Moylan Expeditionary Learning Academy in Hartford. "We called for an efficient plan grounded in science and safety protocols to keep school buildings open. We applaud the governor for prioritizing in-person learning for all students. At the same time, we urge him to keep other essential workers in the 1-b category, too," added Davis, who serves as co-president of the Hartford Federation of Paraeducators, AFT Local 2221.

“The governor recognized that our plan, while ambitious, is achievable,” said Carl Chisem, president of the Connecticut Employees Union Independent (CEUI), SEIU Local 511. “Once vaccinations are completed, an important step toward protecting the health and safety of school communities will have been taken. A similar approach is urgently needed to inoculate the rest of the state’s essential workforce,” added Chisem, who also serves as president of the Municipal Employees Union Independent (MEUI), SEIU Local 506.

The BOE Unions Coalition’s goal is aligned with Gov. Lamont’s pledge to complete vaccination of all Connecticut school employees during the month of March.

“As the parent of two, including a kindergartener, our family is having the incredibly common experience of navigating the challenges of COVID-19 in our school, including distance learning,” said Sarah O’Dell of Redding. “We hear this and other concerns from so many Connecticut Parent Teacher Association (PTA) families. Due to school staff having to quarantine, the inconsistency has been problematic. The Connecticut PTA understands that our education system is doing the best they can in these unprecedented times. We appreciate our state leaders supporting that by prioritizing vaccines to school personnel during the essential worker phase so schools can open safely,” added O’Dell, a Connecticut PTA Legislative Committee member.

The latest CDC science-based guidance calls for states to prioritize school staff after healthcare workers and long-term-care facility residents in order to make schools safer. It confirms that schools need effective measures in place to keep students, educators and staff safe for in-person learning.

“The governor’s decision to vaccinate all school staff as quickly and efficiently as possible is a good one and will be an incredible boost to our children and families,” said Fran Rabinowitz, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS).

Many school districts in Connecticut have not consistently enforced mask-wearing, six feet of social distancing, frequent handwashing, or ensured cleaning and disinfecting, contact tracing or testing. The failure to adhere to health and safety protocols has since last fall thwarted efforts to maintain consistent in-person learning due to frequent building closures and school staff quarantines.

“The state heard our concerns, listened to the science, and decided that to keep schools open and safe for everyone, the best course of action is to vaccinate teachers and staff,” said CEA President Jeff Leake. “Since the leading cause of school closures in Connecticut is teacher and staff shortages due to quarantines, vaccinating our school communities goes a long way toward protecting educators and preventing further school disruptions.”

The CDC’s latest guidelines now also exempt those who are fully vaccinated from needing to quarantine if they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. The coalition’s plan would allow more schools to remain open, despite community spread, if educators and staff are immunized against the virus.

The BOE Union Coalition proposal includes:

- Implementing a parallel school-based vaccination clinic for school staff in school districts;
- Coordinating between school districts and local healthcare and public health institutions to provide on-site or local administration of the vaccine, just as most schools presently do with annual flu shots;
- Providing vaccine clinics at times that do not disrupt school schedules or student learning;
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- Vaccinating 120,000 educators and staff in our K-12 public schools in the month of March.

“We thank the Governor for hearing our plea for a parallel, focused vaccine program for school workers,” said CSEA SEIU Local 2001 Executive Director, David Glidden. “All of those who make in-person learning possible - paraeducators, bus drivers and monitors, secretaries, custodians, teachers, cafeteria workers, nurses and childcare providers - will be able to do so more safely. What is now needed is a parallel approach to the governor’s age-bracketing plan that prioritizes all of Connecticut’s heroic essential workers,” added Glidden.

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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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Attached -

Feb. 19 BOE Unions Coalition letter to Gov. Lamont.

Thursday, February 18, 2021

## Board of Education Coalition School District Vaccine Plan

Dear Governor Lamont:

We know that you, the CDC, and Dr. Anthony Fauci have recommended that the education community be prioritized for vaccines. This is a top priority for the coalition of unions representing school educators and employees listed below, CAPSS representing superintendents, CABE representing boards of education, and the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association representing parents throughout the state.

We are writing about the School District Vaccine Plan that we want to have ready to roll out when the Essential Worker Phase begins at the end of this month.

Families must be comfortable and confident sending their children to school. When students safely interact with teachers and staff, we support their critical social emotional learning and mental health. Vaccinating educators and staff will ensure that there are enough school personnel to make this happen—with educators and staff safe in their work environment.

CDC guidelines now exempt those who are fully vaccinated from needing to quarantine, which will allow more schools to remain open when all educators and staff are vaccinated.

Our goal is for all K-12 school employees to be vaccinated, from start to finish, in the month of March, as Ohio is now doing this month. About half of all states are vaccinating school employees at present. When Connecticut begins vaccinating essential workers, we propose that 30,000 or more vaccines per week be directed to the School District Vaccination effort. Schools will work with local healthcare and public health institutions to provide on-site or local administration of the vaccine, in a manner similar to the way schools administer annual flu shots (understanding that protocols will be different due to the pandemic).

When overseen by school districts, the timing of the vaccinations can be arranged to complement and not disrupt school schedules. Given that there are more than 120,000 educators and staff in our K-12 public schools, and 11,000 in private K-12 schools, the effort for the first shot should be completed in March and would be repeated at the appropriate time for the second shot.

In summary, rolling out the school-based vaccine program as quickly as possible is critical given recent CDC guidance and ongoing concerns regarding safety in schools.<sup>1</sup> The CDC has reiterated that the school community should be prioritized for vaccines. As mentioned above, the CDC has provided new guidance stating that those who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine if they have been exposed to

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<sup>1</sup> [The CDC released two new studies of COVID school safety. Here's what they find.](https://www.chalkbeat.org/2021/2/2/22262837/cdc-studies-school-reopening-wisconsin-covid-safety) Chalkbeat, 2/2/2021. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2021/2/2/22262837/cdc-studies-school-reopening-wisconsin-covid-safety>

Transmission in schools remains a concern. The CDC recently released two studies regarding such transmission. The first, which covered 17 rural schools in Wisconsin, concluded that there were few cases of COVID-19 spread within the schools between September through November 2020. Despite a high number of infection cases detected in the schools, contact tracing could not prove that most of the cases were transmitted in school, and there was no testing to determine whether it had spread through asymptomatic infections. The second study received much less media attention, even though it covered the entire state of Wisconsin. It determined that 5,700 cases were linked to spread in schools and childcare facilities, and that schools had more COVID-19 transmitted cases than restaurants, bars, or food production facilities. The differing conclusions of both studies are tied to the unreliable nature of contact tracing.

someone with COVID-19. Since the leading cause of school closures in Connecticut is the shortage of teachers and staff because of quarantine, vaccinating school employees now will help keep Connecticut schools open.

We would like to schedule a virtual meeting to discuss this at your earliest convenience. Let's work together to vaccinate all educators and staff in the month of March. Thank you.

Sincerely,

**The Board of Education Coalition**

*AFT Connecticut, American Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees, Council 4, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Connecticut Education Association, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association, Municipal Employees Union Independent, MEUI, SEIU Local 506, UAW, Region 9A, CSEA, SEIU Local 2001*