



For Immediate Release:

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New “Back-to-School” Plan Needs More Specifics—Raises Serious Health and Safety Concerns

Today Connecticut Education Association (CEA) President Jeff Leake and AFT Connecticut Vice President Mary Yordon released the following joint statement regarding Governor Ned Lamont’s proposals for resuming in-person learning:

“The safety and health of our public school communities must be first and foremost in any plans to reopen buildings so that educators can teach and students can learn. The road map to return to in-person classroom instruction must be clear, universal and focused on science and the advice of top health experts. It must not jeopardize the health and well-being of our school populations.

“Governor Lamont’s plan, released today, is short on specifics and doesn’t address some of the most pressing issues associated with reopening our buildings this fall. The new plan raises many concerns and leaves dozens of unanswered questions regarding how schools will operate in a COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) world. Simply directing district officials to follow generic CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommendations, without customizing requirements for the realities of our school settings, is insufficient for a safe statewide reopening.

“Schools should not represent exceptions to widespread standards of health and safety. Educators and school staff deserve the kinds of standard protections from infection that have become familiar in every workplace across the state.

“Our dedicated educators look forward to returning to the classroom. Accommodations must be made, especially for those at higher risk, and appropriate guidelines must be in place to provide a safe learning and teaching environment. Those include:

- smaller class sizes;
- routine testing for COVID-19;
- monitoring health and well-being of all students;
- state-provided personal protective equipment (PPE);
- disinfecting schools daily; and
- cleaning classrooms, hallways, bathrooms and commonly shared areas and equipment, including desks and computers, to provide a safe learning and teaching environment.

“Before Connecticut parents send their children into school buildings this fall, they must feel confident that districts have the funds necessary to make schools safe havens. They must know that everyone is following CDC guidelines for health and safety — and that our buildings are not incubators for spreading COVID-19.

“There are deep disparities that exist among our school communities, especially in our Alliance Districts. We need to ensure that they all have access to the resources needed to implement social distancing and CDC guidelines in order to keep our schools healthy and safe. We need more, not less, funding as our students return to school and rebound from the pandemic and the inevitable learning loss and trauma that come with it. Without it, we will see greater inequities across our districts that will jeopardize the well-being of everyone in those communities.

“Now is not the time to undo all the sacrifices and progress that we have been making over the past few months. Nothing could be worse than putting our students and educators in harm’s way due to the lack of a well-funded, well-thought-out strategic plan for our public schools.

“Successfully returning to in-person learning depends largely on local districts ensuring a real voice for all stakeholders — educators, parents and other school community members — in determining our ‘new normal.’ Teachers and school support staff must have the opportunity to provide input, ideas and proposals to districts and the state’s education department to ensure students and our members’ safety.

“We are eager to bring education back into school buildings for many reasons: to improve academic and other outcomes for all students — and allow parents to get back to work. We know learning is more equitable and effective when it takes place in person, with the kind of responsive community environment that our children deserve. That also requires providing adequate health and safety measures.”

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The Connecticut Education Association is Connecticut’s largest teachers’ union, representing active and retired educators across the state.

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.

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