

For Immediate Release:

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Educators Take to the Streets in Coordinated "Safety First" Car Caravan Rallies

Teachers, paraeducators, aides and school support staff in 25 coordinated demonstrations throughout Connecticut call for safety, equitable funding in building reopening plans

From Stamford to Stonington, Hamden to Hartford, and more than two dozen towns in between, teachers, education personnel, students, parents and advocates today joined school "Safety First" car caravans. The purpose was to demand safety and health precautions — and much-needed funding — in Connecticut public school building reopening plans.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of our students, our teachers and our school communities," said Connecticut Education Association (CEA) President Jeff Leake. "CEA and AFT Connecticut organized the car caravans to amplify voices calling for resources needed to fully implement protocols that could help prevent the spread of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) in our schools."

"Our members have repeatedly called for directing additional resources to local and regional districts in order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19," said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. "Without the additional funding, many of our schools cannot implement the needed CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidance to keep students and staff safe."

"To reimagine a new normal for public education based on science takes resources," said AFT Connecticut Vice President for Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) Shellye Davis. "Our message today is the same as it has been since last spring — fund our future on behalf of our students, our colleagues and our communities!"

The largest caravan was in Hartford, which traveled to the official residence of Governor Ned Lamont. Events took place in two dozen other cities and towns, including:

- Bethel;
- Bridgeport;
- Brookfield;
- Danbury;
- East Hartford;
- East Lyme;
- Greenwich;
- Haddam;
- Hamden;
- Naugatuck;
- New Haven;
- Norwalk;
- Norwich;
- Putnam;
- Seymour;
- Simsbury;
- Stamford;
- Stonington;
- Stratford;
- Vernon;
- Wallingford;
- Willimantic;
- Wolcott; &
- Woodbridge.

The caravans traveled through their communities to draw attention to teachers' and education personnels' safety concerns — and their demand for adequate funding to provide safe teaching and learning environments.

National Education Association (NEA) President Lily Eskelsen-Garcia kicked off the Hartford event thanking educators for all their hard work, dedication, and advocacy on behalf of their students and their profession.

In a pre-recorded video, Eskelsen-Garcia told educators, "we need to let our voices be heard and we need to listen to the health experts. We can't have 35 kids in a classroom. We have to do something different and we need to make sure kids with hybrid or virtual learning have what they need to make sure every child is served."

According to recent CEA research, more than half of Connecticut's teachers are either at high risk for developing serious illnesses from COVID-19 or care for someone who is. The data presents severe constraints on educators' ability to return to in-person teaching.

"No one wants to return to school more than our dedicated educators," added Leake. "During a global pandemic, but we owe it to our students and educators to provide for their safety and security."

Union members urge state officials to follow the guidelines presented in AFT's "Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities" and adopt the actions outlined in CEA's "Safe Learning Plan." The reports focus on physical health and safety standards, combined with CDC protocols and commonsense approaches to keeping our school communities safe.

Read [AFT's "Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities" at aft.org](#).

Read [CEA's "Safe Learning Plan" at cea.org](#).

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The Connecticut Education Association is Connecticut's largest teachers' union, representing active, retired, and aspiring 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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