



*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

As Adopted Unanimously by the Ohio Education Association Board of Directors

July 28, 2020

Position Statement on Safe and Equitable Reopening Plans for Schools and Campus Buildings for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

On the authority of the Ohio Education Association (OEA) Board of Directors, it is the position of the OEA that Ohio's schools and campuses should only reopen for in-person instruction when conditions are met that ensure the safety of students, educators, education support professionals, their families and communities.

OEA stands with its members, parents and community partners in recognizing the critical role schools play in academic and non-academic success of students and believes that the reopening of schools for in-person instruction is essential for the wellbeing of students, families and communities. Given the dangers posed by the spread of COVID-19, however, OEA believes that reopening for in-person instruction prematurely poses unacceptable risks to the lives and health of students, adults who work in schools, and the people they care for. Our members have entered education professions because they deeply care about the success of all students, and we are committed to meeting the needs of students in any mode of learning that maintains safety, including through remote learning as long as it is necessary.

Given the alarming number of positive coronavirus cases in Ohio, OEA calls on Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Health to require adherence to all standards based on U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for schools, including

- mandatory mask or face coverings for students, staff and visitors,
- strict adherence to six-foot physical distancing between individuals,
- stringent handwashing and sanitizing protocols,
- daily health checks for students and staff,
- strict protocols for quarantining and isolating those who are presumed positive for COVID-19 and anyone who has been exposed to the virus.

Ample testing must also be available to ensure individuals afflicted with COVID-19 are negative prior to returning to school, and evidence-based protocols for contact tracing must also be in place to ensure anyone who has been exposed to the virus is alerted and required to be isolated from the school or campus population.



The shutdown of schools to in-person learning for the last several months of the 2019-2020 academic year both exposed and exacerbated deep levels of inequity in our education system, hitting students with special needs, students of color, and students in high-poverty communities especially hard. OEA is committed to advocating for equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of what mode of instruction is offered in any given time or location. All decisions on how and when to reopen schools must be made with attention to meeting student needs, starting with health and safety.

Under Ohio's warning system, OEA believes that any school or campus building located in a county designated as Level 4 (purple) or Level 3 (red) must remain closed to in-person instruction. Until a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 is widely available, schools in all counties, including Level 2 (orange) and Level 1 (yellow) must be permitted to open for in-person instruction only if all CDC requirements can be fully met.<sup>1</sup> If a school or campus building is located in a county that is downgraded from Level 4 (purple) or Level 3 (red) to Level 2 (orange) or Level 1 (yellow) due to a reduction of risk factors as identified by the state, a minimum of two weeks must be provided to allow for transition from remote to in-person instruction.

No education employee in any setting should be forced to choose between their livelihood and their health or safety. High-risk students, staff and families must be protected through appropriate accommodations such as remote learning and instruction arrangements. Those who are required to quarantine or isolate themselves because of exposure to COVID-19 should be provided with extensions of leave that allow them to be protected from economic harm because of their inability to perform their work in an in-person educational setting.

To open safely, Ohio's public schools need resources. OEA calls on elected leaders at the federal and state level to act swiftly to provide additional emergency funding for public education to cover increased costs associated with the COVID pandemic, including but not limited to the following:

- funding for additional teachers to allow for smaller class sizes to meet physical distancing requirements
- funding for school nurses and school health support staff to implement protocols for symptomatic students and staff
- funding for staffing to cover substitute or temporary staff to ensure supervision of classes when teachers are required to be isolated and/or work remotely due to exposure to the virus or underlying risk factors
- funding for additional bus drivers, bus aides and other costs associated with increased school bus routes to ensure physical distancing for safe transportation of students
- funding for additional paraprofessionals and other education support staff to assist with student learning and safety needs

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<sup>1</sup> School districts or campuses that are located in multiple counties should adhere to restrictions linked to the county with the highest alert level.

- funding for additional custodial staff to perform essential cleaning and disinfecting of schools, campus buildings, and buses
- funding for essential personal protective equipment (PPE), masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and other materials needed to maintain a safe learning environment in schools and campus buildings and in school transportation
- funding for improvements to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems to ensure air quality and limit viral spread
- funding for the installation of plexiglass protections where necessary
- funding to provide sufficient classroom supplies and consumables so all students have their own
- funding for technology devices and high-speed internet access to ensure all students have reliable, quality access to remote learning platforms
- funding for professional development and training to ensure educators are well prepared to deliver quality instruction in a variety of modes, including remotely
- funding for wraparound services and staffing to meet a range of social, emotional, nutritional, and health needs as students and families, particularly those from high-poverty backgrounds, struggle with issues related to the downturn in the economy
- funding for increased childcare needs for school employees and families in our communities.

Procedures must be in place to ensure educators and families have a voice in how any return to in-person instruction occurs and how necessary protections function throughout the school year. Recognizing that school districts and institutions of higher education have control at the local level over the how schools and campuses will operate within public health requirements, including contingency plans for in-person, hybrid and remote modes of instruction, OEA is committed to supporting each of its local affiliates as they use the collective bargaining process and health and safety committees for creative problem-solving. OEA will continue to organize and engage members to effectively advocate for healthy and safe learning and working conditions, essential legal protections for members, and equitable learning opportunities for all students.