



For Immediate Release

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Students, School Staff and Families at Risk Due to Lack of State Policy Following COVID-19 Outbreaks

State mandate, transparency and open communication must guide local and regional districts to keep everyone safe

Just days after the majority of Connecticut students physically returned to the classroom, more than a dozen school districts across the state reported positive COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) cases. From Newington to Naugatuck, Waterbury to Glastonbury, and East Hartford to West Haven, varying degrees of action have been taken at each impacted building. Some have shut down completely, others isolated cohorts of students and put classes in quarantine, some moved to all distance learning, and others did little or nothing.

The coalition of unions representing more than 60,000 public education employees is calling on the state to implement specific policies regarding handling COVID-19 outbreaks in schools. Members are insisting on guidelines that follow federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state health department guidelines to assure student and staff safety.

“While we understand each school district is unique, the state must provide specific protocols that districts must follow when someone tests positive for the virus, including providing detailed information to parents and teachers,” said Connecticut Education Association (CEA) President Jeff Leake. “The absence of consistent guidelines and adherence to protocols is evident in many districts, as is a lack of quality PPE and CDC-approved disinfecting and cleaning supplies. Without state mandates, transparency, and open communication, districts are jeopardizing the health and safety of entire school communities.”

The coalition’s [*Core Principles Regarding the Safe Reopening of School Buildings*](#), released last month, recommended 13 necessary protocols to protect student and staff health. Today coalition leaders renew the call for the implementation of these common-sense standards to ensure the safety of school communities and all of Connecticut’s residents.

“Across the state, we’re seeing red flags. We can’t ignore the signs,” said Stacie Harris-Byrdsong, president of AFSCME Local 3194, representing paraeducators, lead educators, childcare workers and oral interpreters at Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) schools.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have heard people say we are in this together. That’s true and it’s why our unions are calling for consistent statewide procedures and transparency. We need to ensure parents, the public, and entire school communities know the procedures and what’s being done when a COVID-19 case is confirmed,” added Harris-Byrdsong, who is also

the secretary of Council 4, representing thousands of non-teaching board of education employees in districts across the state.

“Our school districts need the state to provide a specific roadmap with tighter policies and protocols,” said Kristen Malloy-Scanlon, president of the West Haven Federation of Teachers and School Nurses, AFT Local 1547. “Local administrators should not indiscriminately make decisions behind closed doors that affect the lives of so many. Parents must be part of the process and apprised as situations requiring action arise. Anything less is not just disrespectful, it’s downright dangerous,” she said.

"State officials can help bridge gaps that go beyond the reach or capacity of district administrators," added Malloy-Scanlon, who teaches literacy at Savin Rock Community School. "Here in West Haven, for example, the city’s health department is not responding to our school nurses in a timely manner. That’s the kind of communication breakdown that puts students and educators’ lives at risk and demands action from the top,” she said.

Union leaders maintain that health and safety must be the top priorities and that state officials must help protect our school communities. Growing research confirming that children can readily transmit COVID-19 adds urgency to their demands.

Leake stressed, “the ability to get through this crisis depends on everyone working toward the same goal and state government protecting its citizens. We urge the state to act quickly and decisively to implement statewide protocols and ensure transparency to protect the safety of our students, teachers, staff, and our communities. We must get this right.”

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