

REOPENING OF PUBLIC PREK-12 SCHOOLS FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

National PTA understands that the reopening of our nation's preK-12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic is vital to ensure the continuity of education, however it should not outweigh the safety and the mental and physical health of our students, educators, school employees and families. It is our association's position that plans for reopening shall incorporate the best available science and the expertise of infectious disease doctors and health practitioners. Plans should also strictly follow the most up-to-date Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, including but not limited to reasonable social distancing, rigorous sanitizing processes and viral screening and testing protocols. National PTA believes that states and school districts must plan and align logistics, educational strategies and public health approaches into one coherent response. We recognize that there will not be a one-size fits all process for the reopening of schools.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement is essential for effective decision-making and implementation. Any decision to reopen schools must involve parents, families, students, educators, school employees, public health experts and community members in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2020-2021 school year. The presence of the parent and student voice and attention to unique family situations is critical to the successful reopening of schools. Effective stakeholder engagement must be inclusive, transparent, provide multiple opportunities for input and include meaningful, clear and concise communication. All information and protocols should be disseminated to parents, families, students, and communities, using current best practices for family and student engagement. Furthermore, all communications must be accessible to parents with disabilities and available in other languages.

Schools must be prepared to address the transition to back to school, the trauma of a pandemic and the many instructional issues, including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide. Students will likely return to schools with serious gaps in their learning and retention and unique social-emotional needs. Schools must be prepared to identify indicators, such as symptoms of trauma, learning loss and/or retention and have the requisite funding and community partnerships to effectively support the student and their family as reopening occurs. School districts must ensure multiple modes of instruction and scheduling plans are developed in order to remediate and support students, wherever they are on the continuum. Close adherence to local and state academic standards is imperative as we begin the long, arduous and as yet unknown process of reopening our nation's preK-12 schools.

National PTA strongly supports a robust federal investment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which include investments in public health, public schools, universities, hospitals, and local and state governments. National PTA urges the federal and state governments to provide the funding necessary to ensure that when our schools reopen, they have the resources needed to do so as safely and successfully as possible. Many of our nation's school districts are already working without the resources needed to provide an equitable education and critical

supports to all students. The added strain of recovery from a worldwide pandemic will wreak havoc on all localities and will require significant, immediate and continuing support from federal and state funding. While our public schools have been woefully under-resourced, this next phase of “returning to school” is an opportunity to visualize what public education looks like in a post-pandemic era, to ensure every child can reach their fullest potential regardless of zip code.