



REOPENING SCHOOL BUILDINGS SAFELY





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Our Mission

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Reopening School Buildings Safely

There is no question that educators want to be back in their classrooms with their students. They know that kids need in-person learning and that remote instruction is no substitute for it. Educators know that 30 million children rely on schools for food each day, that the digital divide increases inequities among children, and that schools are places to build relationships and have positive social interactions. But reopening school buildings has to be done safely.

Given how important the reopening of school buildings is for the education and well-being of children, as well as for parents and caregivers who work outside the home and for the reopening of the economy as a whole, it is shocking that the conditions to do it right are completely absent.

The AFT has focused for months on what it will take to reopen schools safely, specifically, to ensure the safety and well-being of educators, students and our communities. Back in April, we issued our “Plan to Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities.” It’s based on science and public health protocols as well as educator, school staff and healthcare expertise.

Unfortunately, President Trump, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and the powers that be, in too many places, have demanded school buildings reopen with no consideration of the health and safety of children and educators. A large number of states have rising, not falling numbers of COVID-19 cases. It is a catastrophe in the making to send educators and children back to school in states where the virus is surging. And those who are pushing for it are attempting to pit parents and children against educators, and to blame educators and their unions, in order to distract from the months they’ve spent denying and downplaying the virus, instead of fulfilling their obligation to provide the resources and conditions educators and students desperately need.

Before the virus’ resurgence, and before Trump’s and DeVos’ reckless “open or else” threats, 76 percent of AFT members polled in June said they were comfortable returning to school buildings if the proper safeguards were in place. Now they’re afraid and angry. Many are quitting, retiring or writing their wills. Parents are afraid and angry, too. A recent AP poll shows that the majority of Americans think that school buildings should reopen only with major adjustments or else revert to remote instruction.

There are three conditions essential for school buildings to reopen:

- 1.** Low infection rates and adequate testing in any region where in-school learning is being considered;
- 2.** Public health safeguard to help prevent the spread of the virus in school, including masks and social distancing, cleaning and ventilation, handwashing, and reasonable accommodations for those at risk; and
- 3.** The necessary resources to enact each and every one of these safeguards, as well as to provide the supports required to meet kids’ academic, social and emotional needs. Because states have been so badly hit, federal resources are absolutely essential.

And parents, students, school staff and their unions must be involved, not sidelined.

Despite the failures and undermining of safety and science by the Trump administration and elected officials like Florida's Gov. Ron DeSantis, a number of states and districts, and their educators' unions, have been focused on how to open the right way. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, what follows is a look at some of the practices emerging from across the country to reopen safely. We will continue to update our guidance and resources based on new developments, the experience of our members, and the latest guidance from scientists and health professionals.

REMOTE LEARNING IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR IN-PERSON SCHOOLING

We know the best way for students to connect, learn and thrive is in person, in school. Schools are essential public goods that prepare students to be informed and productive citizens, as well as provide critical nutrition, counseling and social services, especially for disadvantaged students.

This past spring's unwanted experiment has made clear what we had long known before the pandemic: Remote learning cannot be a substitute for in-person learning. In a poll of our members in late June, 86 percent of educators said they believed the digital learning time this past spring was inadequate for their students. Now even Betsy DeVos, who previously evangelized remote instruction and virtual charter schools, is a believer in in-school learning.

Schools provide many essential services to students and must find a way to meet those needs even if school buildings are not open for in-person instruction. School feeding programs are one such essential: Feeding America estimates 1 in 4 children, or 18 million, are experiencing daily hunger due to school closures from COVID-19. The Trump administration must provide flexibility to schools so that school meal programs can continue.

FOLLOWING PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES MUST BE PARAMOUNT

As important as in-person instruction is, safety comes first. To help guide reopenings, the [AFT released a framework in April](#) to help states, districts, schools, educators and families plan for the right way to open schools, including safety, instructional and well-being considerations. The framework is based on science and public health protocols as well as educator, school staff and healthcare expertise—not on politics or wishful thinking—to provide comprehensive guidance on how to reopen safely and provide for the needs of our students. In June, 76 percent of AFT members polled said they were comfortable returning to school if the proper safeguards were in place.

Since then, we have seen a resurgence of the coronavirus in states in the South and the West, and we've witnessed Trump's and DeVos' reckless "open or else" threats. Now, AFT members are afraid. Many are quitting, retiring or writing their wills. A [USA Today poll](#) from May found 1 in 5 teachers would not return if school buildings

opened in the fall. And a poll administered in mid-July by the Florida Education Association found even starker results: 39% said the COVID-19 pandemic is making it more likely they will leave teaching or retire early. Parents are afraid, too. A new AP poll shows that the majority of Americans think that school buildings should reopen only with major adjustments or else go to remote instruction.

As we necessarily adapt to changing conditions and new information about the coronavirus and its transmission, one thing must be enduring: We cannot follow the whims of politicians whose values and goals do not align with the common good. We must follow available science and public health guidance, and the expertise of educators and health practitioners, and we must be ready to adopt new expert guidance as new evidence comes to light.

Community transmission

As we have seen across the country, premature return to normal activity without proper precautions risks infection surges and new lockdowns, which harm our communities and our economy. There is also mounting evidence suggesting children may transmit COVID-19 at rates similar to adults.¹ Evolving research on coronavirus transmission recognizes variability in COVID-19 symptoms in children, which means schools must have effective disease surveillance capability in the event of school outbreaks.

All of us need to maintain physical distancing and use face coverings outside of the home, and many of us may need to stay home from our offices, bars and restaurants so that schools can open, and stay open.²

Based on what is currently known about the coronavirus and its spread, these two conditions must be met in order to reopen safely with in-person instruction:

- 1. Containment of the virus**, which could be demonstrated by a combination of indicators, including demonstrated decline in new cases and hospitalizations for at least 14 days; adequate ICU bed capacity to respond to a surge; a positive test rate of less than 5 percent; a low rate of transmission rate; and testing, contact tracing and isolation capacity in a given public health jurisdiction.³
- 2. A public health infrastructure** that would provide support to school districts to implement effective disease surveillance, testing, tracing and isolation protocols for those infected and quarantined, to help prevent spread within a school if there is a positive case.

Safety protocols for schools

Once the virus is contained and outbreaks thwarted by a testing and tracing infrastructure, we must take every precaution to ensure students, teachers and staff have, through district plans, the best public health strategies in place for controlling the spread of COVID-19.

While there won't be a one-size-fits-all process, there are some components to opening schools⁴ that are key to preventing transmission of COVID-19:

Physical distancing of a minimum of 6 feet

[CDC guidance](#) remains clear: There must be a physical distance of at least 6 feet⁵ at all times among students and staff, as COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) for a sustained period of time. Physical distancing should be maintained whenever possible, including, but not limited, to: waiting for the school bus, entering/exiting/sitting on the school bus, entering and exiting the school, between classes, during meals, during recess and other physical activities, and in the classroom. Some have been pushing to allow for a distance of 3 feet for cost reasons, but cost should not outweigh public health guidance.

As physical distancing will reduce capacity, many districts are considering hybrid options where students come to school two days a week and participate in remote learning two days a week, with one day a week for teacher planning and individual follow-up with students. With the hybrid model and the need for smaller class sizes, we'll need to lean on paraprofessionals more, both remotely and in-person. They may be particularly valuable in supporting learning through one-on-one interactions with students and families.

Some districts are considering bringing back younger students nearly full time, and using middle and high school buildings for additional classroom space to account for physical distancing requirements. While challenging in terms of staff deployment, transportation and the experience for older students, it may be a viable way to address current scientific knowledge about the ways the virus spreads and who spreads it.

Barriers between students, such as Plexiglas, may be appropriate in some circumstances; however, there must be proper protocols for cleaning them.

[New York:](#)

"To maintain the safety of students and staff school districts plans must include physical/social distancing of six feet. In instances when six feet cannot be maintained proper face coverings must be worn in common areas such as hallways or on school buses. Provide exemptions or alternatives for those medically unable to wear masks. . . . Ensure that a distance of twelve feet in all directions is maintained between individuals while participating in activities requires projecting the voice (e.g., singing), playing a wind instrument, or aerobic activity resulting in heavy breathing (e.g., participating in gym classes)."

Hand washing

Students and staff must have access to fully stocked handwashing facilities throughout the day, and hand sanitizer should be available for when access to handwashing facilities isn't immediately available. Hands should be washed or sanitized whenever needed, including directly prior to entering the school bus, entering and exiting the school, before and after eating, and after using the bathroom, nose blowing, or touching something that has been handled by someone else. There should be hand-washing breaks built into the day and instruction on proper handwashing technique.

Connecticut:

"Maximize use of disposable towels in lieu of hand dryers, due to ventilation considerations. Turn off and avoid use of hand dryers.

"Provide adequate supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol (for staff and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings (as feasible), and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans."

Face coverings and personal protective equipment

Cloth face coverings are recommended as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. As those without symptoms can still be contagious, face coverings must be worn indoors and on the bus whenever possible, even if physical distance is maintained. Face coverings do not need to be required outdoors if physical distancing protocols can be maintained. Districts must provide appropriate guidance for those who cannot wear face coverings or must be in proximity to those who are without face coverings.

Experts say face shields have limits to the amount of protection they can offer, and their efficacy has not yet been widely studied. Face shields **alone should not be used as a primary means of reducing transmission**. However, shields with a drape that can be tucked into the neck of a shirt might be appropriate for limited short-term use when face masks can't be worn.

Districts must develop a written PPE and face covering policy that spells out:

- Requirements for student, staff and faculty masking
- Who is responsible for providing PPE and masks
- Methods to support students and staff who must remove their masks for specific health reasons—sneezing, coughing, dermal irritation, etc.
- Cleaning and maintenance methods for reusable masks

Those staff who, by the nature of their jobs, cannot be 6 feet from their students (for example, those who work with students who have certain disabilities or speech), or whose students cannot wear face coverings in the classroom, must be provided the same PPE a healthcare worker would be provided, such as N95s, surgical masks, face shields⁶ and gloves.

In these special situations, alternative masks should be considered that have a clear panel in front of the mouth. These may be helpful for students when seeing facial expressions or reading lips is important. But like other face masks, there is not enough data at present to determine their level of efficacy.

Minnesota:

"All students, staff, and other people present in school buildings and district offices or riding on school transportation vehicles are required to wear a face covering. Face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer does not know they are infected. ... The covering should cover the nose and mouth completely, should not be overly tight or restrictive, and should feel comfortable to wear. A face covering is not meant to substitute for social distancing, but is especially important in situations when maintaining a 6-foot distance is not possible. Face coverings should not be placed on anyone under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance, or anyone who cannot tolerate a face covering due to a developmental, medical, or behavioral health condition."

Sanitation and cleaning

Districts need to establish protocols for routine cleaning and disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces in buildings and on school transportation vehicles. All cleaning and disinfecting products should meet EPA requirements for SARS-CoV-2. Staff should be trained on how to properly use and protect themselves while using these products. At a minimum, districts should comply with the "Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools and Homes" from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Disinfectants based on hydrogen peroxide or alcohol are safer and should be considered over other products. Soap and water kills the virus, and could be a safe way for students to clean their spaces.

Washington state:

"If your program is in a public school building, coordinate the use of chemical products with the school maintenance staff. Clean and sanitize toys, equipment, and surfaces in the program space. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces like doorknobs, faucet handles, check-in counters, and restrooms. Use alcohol wipes or 70% isopropyl alcohol to clean keyboards and electronics. Outdoor areas generally require normal routine cleaning and do not require disinfection. Wash hands after you clean.

If groups of students are moving from one area to another in shifts, finish cleaning before the new group enters the area. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces each night after students leave.

Always follow the disinfectant instructions on the label:

- Use disinfectants in a ventilated space. Heavy use of disinfectant products should be done when children are not present and the facility should air out before children return.
- Use the proper concentration of disinfectant.
- Keep the disinfectant on the surface for the required wet contact time.

- Follow the product label warnings and instructions for PPE such as gloves, eye protection, and ventilation.
- Keep all chemicals out of reach of children.
- Facilities must have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each chemical used in the facility.
- Parents, teachers, and staff should not supply disinfectants and sanitizers.”

Ventilation and Building Systems

Having proper air circulation and filtration in indoor environments is necessary for the control of the spread of viruses, including SARS-CoV-2. Districts need to establish protocols on inspecting, repairing and providing maintenance on ventilation systems within their buildings. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers has developed proactive guidance in their document, [“Reopening of Schools and Universities”](#) to help address coronavirus disease concerns with respect to the operation and maintenance of heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems. In general, they recommend establishing enhanced inspection and maintenance of the systems in addition to increased ventilation and filtration measures.

In addition, the National Energy Management Institute and the University of California at Davis Energy and Efficiency Institute issued a white paper titled [“Proposed Ventilation and Energy Efficiency Verification and Repair Program for Buildings.”](#) They propose a Building Reopening Ventilation and Energy Efficiency Verification and Repair Program that would certify that building ventilation and filtration systems meet recommendations to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

Considerations for buildings without centralized systems include keeping windows opened to allow for some minimum level of fresh air exchange in occupied spaces. If there are window air conditioning units, they should be adjusted to maximize fresh air intake into the system, and blower fans should be set at low speed and pointed away from room occupants to the extent possible.

For a detailed, comprehensive approach to proper school ventilation, view [Connecticut’s](#) requirements.

Public health support

Governors should establish dedicated public health personnel in state and local health departments and implement rigorous coordination between state departments of education and health when considering and issuing guidance to school districts. Guidance should be jointly vetted and issued. Funding should be provided to public health departments to provide active consultation to school districts on implementing what are, in essence, public health strategies, as districts have little or no capacity to do this.

Reasonable accommodations

Staff who are at high risk for serious health problems or death if they contract COVID-19 should have [access to special accommodations or workplace adjustments](#).

The potential for significant health and economic consequences makes accommodations an imperative in the calculus of how to reopen school buildings safely.

Federal laws, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, can obligate employers to provide a reasonable accommodation to employees who have certain health conditions or substantially limiting impairments, so long as the employee can still provide the essential functions of the job. In addition to the ADA, federal and state family leave laws are critical for addressing the needs of employees who require job-protected leave to care for themselves or a family member.

[CDC guidance](#) designed to reduce infection in workplaces underscores the importance of supporting school employees who are at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Accommodation measures like remote learning and flexible leave policies not only help preserve the health of employees; these actions also avoid the “brain drain” that comes with high turnover; we can’t afford the loss of crucial knowledge and experience needed to innovate and cultivate new, effective learning strategies in a time of uncertainty.

[New York:](#)

District plans must include policies “regarding vulnerable populations, including students, faculty and staff who are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness, and individuals who may not feel comfortable returning to an in-person educational environment, to allow them to safely participate in educational activities and, where appropriate, accommodate their specific circumstances. These accommodations may include but are not limited to remote learning or telework, modified educational or work settings, or providing additional PPE to individuals with underlying health conditions. Responsible Parties must also identify and describe any modifications to social distancing or PPE that may be necessary for certain student or staff populations, including individuals who have hearing impairment or loss, students receiving language services, and young students in early education programs, ensuring that any modifications minimize COVID-19 exposure risk for students, faculty, and staff, to the greatest extent possible.”

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IS NEEDED AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION-MAKING

The alignment of logistics, educational strategies and public health tools really matter, which is why our members and leaders, families and community partners must be at the table together, envisioning and implementing plans to reopen our schools.

Reopening plans are going to be living documents that will need to be reviewed and revised on a regular basis as new information comes out about COVID-19, as protective

measures are implemented and outcomes measured, and as local outbreaks occur. It's vital that the school district work with key stakeholders, including local affiliates, parents and local health agencies to develop and modify these plans.⁷

New Jersey:

"Adjusting the school environment to ensure the health and safety of students and staff will require a great deal of planning. School districts should create Restart Committees to coordinate the overall reopening plan. These Committees should include district- and school-level administrators, school board members or charter trustees, local education association representatives, educators, parents, and students.

"School districts should also establish school-based Pandemic Response Teams to centralize, expedite, and implement COVID-19-related decision-making. Each school team should have a liaison that reports to district-level administrators to ensure coordinated actions across the district. Pandemic Response Teams should include a cross section of administrators, teachers and staff, and parents and should represent a cross-section of the school community including its gender and racial diversity."

IN-PERSON OR REMOTE, TEACHING AND LEARNING MUST BE DELIBERATE AND FOCUSED

Although the safety and health of students, staff and community members are paramount, so too is the need for high-quality teaching and learning to continue. A multifaceted approach is required to truly meet the educational needs of students in the coming year, including wraparound services and increasing the number of community schools.⁸ Educators are eager to focus on the academic needs of those whose development has fallen further behind because of the interruption to regular schooling; they want to help all students reach grade-level standards. Real attention is being paid to what instruction should look like in this new environment—efforts we will continue to support. Yet, in order to properly address academics this year and beyond, deliberate consideration⁹ must be given to the context in which the school year is beginning. Below are key components that must be in place at the start of the school year to support teaching and learning:

Building relationships and supporting student well-being

As our country faces intersecting crises, many students will begin the school year with challenges to their mental health. All staff should be trained in how to identify students struggling with trauma and refer students to mental health professionals for additional support. While social-emotional learning and well-being is always important, it must be a particular focus of the first few weeks. It will be especially important for educators to be trained on how to engage with families during this time.

Remote learning readiness

With the resurgence of cases and growing hotspots, all-remote learning for a period of time is likely for a large number of students this coming school year, and teachers

and paraprofessionals must be prepared to go remote at any time. It is easier to adapt a lesson designed to be delivered online to in-person learning than the reverse. School districts must ensure that all students have the devices and connectivity they need to continue schooling remotely.

This past spring highlighted the massive challenges posed by remote learning. Sometimes with central support, and sometimes with trial and error, teachers learned much about what works—and what doesn't—in remote instruction. We need to harness that hard-won experience, as well as provide real support, professional development and a clearinghouse of good practices to do this work. Students, families and educators need access to high-quality digital resources that support remote teaching and learning—this must include access to devices and high-speed internet.

Collaboration and professional development

Supporting and uplifting the professionalism of educators must be the bedrock of instructional efforts. Now more than ever, educators need the agency to advocate for the resources to teach either face to face or virtually. Teachers and staff across the country did an amazing job of quickly switching to remote learning with little notice, to meet the needs of students. However, we know that remote learning—especially when not done deliberately and with sufficient planning time—does not meet the needs of students as well as in-person. Teachers must be given the time, training and tools to work with colleagues to determine the needs of their students and the best ways to meet them. And they must be able to work with administrators to effectively engage paraprofessionals and school support personnel in distance learning, as their skills, resourcefulness and relationships with the students are more important than ever in these remote environments. Virtual parent-teacher home visits can be a useful strategy for educators and other school staff to build and maintain relationships with families and students.

While teachers will not likely be able to teach side by side, physically, small teams of teachers can be collectively responsible for the suite of delivery methods to support the same groups of children. Coordination of in-person and virtual, and live and asynchronous remote, learning will require more, not less, time to plan and collaborate. The number of courses taught at one time, and the number of preps per teacher per day must be dramatically limited to accomplish this effectively. For instances where hybrid models are being used, a single teacher should not be responsible for students who are learning in-person and remotely at the same time. And teachers and schools staff may be able to plan and teach remotely, while maintaining safe physical distancing from each other and with cleaning protocols in place, from inside school buildings at the start of the school year before it makes sense to bring in any students.¹⁰

Diagnostic assessments

Well-designed diagnostic assessments can help teachers understand where each student is starting the school year and guide the introduction of project-based learning and performance-based assessments. This student-centered approach to learning is particularly conducive to teaching in the time of COVID-19, where it may not be known with certainty whether learning will be in-person, remote or a hybrid.

The [Learning Policy Institute](#) provides a good overview of what we need to do for our schools to meet the needs of students during this time.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS NEEDED TO OPEN SCHOOLS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES

In large part, school districts know what measures are needed, but they are immobilized by lack of funding and lack of space, by windows that don't open and bathrooms without soap. The average school will need at least \$1.2 million, or \$2,300 per student, to open its doors safely.

Without accounting for other budget cuts, that's at least \$116 billion needed—to have the resources to protect the health of students, staff and families. And this doesn't address the pressing need for child care for those who need it. But state and local budgets are cratering.¹¹ Almost 1 million people who work in schools and colleges have already lost their jobs in this recession. And 1.4 million more educators will lose their jobs if the Republicans in the Senate deny states and schools the funds they need for essential services.¹²

We call on those we have elected to do their jobs. State and local economies, and the educational futures of millions of schoolchildren, are depending on them.

CONCLUSION

Again, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to safely reopening schools, but there are essential criteria that must be met. That will require funding; planning that includes educators, parents and communities; and following the guidance of scientists and health professionals. That is what we owe children, educators and parents in this moment.

Endnotes

^[1] Arnaud G. L'Huillier, Giulia Torriani, Fiona Pigny, Laurent Kaiser, and Isabella Eckerle, "Infectious SARS-CoV-2 in Nasopharynx of Symptomatic Neonates, Children, and Adolescents," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 26, no. 10 (October 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2610.202403>.

^[2] In communities where there is significant community spread, safe classrooms cannot be guaranteed. However, we know that physical distancing and wearing face coverings can drastically reduce spread within the population. [Read this for more on what current studies tell us about the safety of opening schools, and the importance of nonmedical interventions.](#)

^[3] As an organization, we rely on experts and advancements in public health and infectious disease to determine the most reliable indicia for reopening of schools in a way that minimizes transmission of disease in school buildings and communities. The lack of a federal standard also contributes to continued variations in minimum thresholds.

^[4] While the comparisons are imperfect given scale and other issues, it is important to consider lessons we can learn from international examples, as well as from in-person pilot summer programs in places like Newark, N.J., and some of the many child care programs that have been serving essential workers throughout the pandemic.

^[5] Six feet is the current minimum recommendation for physical distancing from the CDC, but it is important to pay attention to future modifications in public health recommendations. How this is measured, and how it translates into classroom space requirements, has varied, however to maintain 6 feet of distance from others indoors, about 113 square feet of space is required.

^[6] If a mask or cloth face covering cannot be worn in conjunction with a shield, the face shield should have a drape that covers the area below the end of the shield so it can be tucked into a shirt.

^[7] In Cleveland, for example, the district understood the important expertise and perspective of educators and treated them as an integral partner during the process of reopening. The Cleveland Teachers Union and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District jointly came to the difficult decision to begin the school year remotely, and they are currently working together to outline clear expectations, roles and responsibilities for members and students, as well as the supports, training and resources the district will provide.

^[8] The AFT has long promoted the community schools model, and we have seen that community schools are responding well to our current crises because they already have the infrastructures and processes in place to coordinate support and services for students and families. They also already have a school-based decision-making table, made up of educators, administrators, parents, community partners and, in some cases, students, to help keep track of what issues need to be addressed and pivot quickly. They also can more readily lean on their community partners to jump in and provide services, when needed.

^[9] The Boston Teachers Union, Massachusetts Teachers Association and AFT Massachusetts jointly developed [reopening proposals](#) that do a thoughtful job of approaching the school year with four phases. The process begins with staff-level collaboration and includes getting to know students and families before the first six weeks of school, which they propose should be focused on relationship building.

^[10] Allowing teachers time at the beginning of the school year to collaborate and plan will go a long way. Massachusetts is doing this by reducing the days students will be in school by 10 days, so that time can be spent by educators for collaboration and planning.

^[11] Even by conservative estimates, states will need between [\\$200 billion and \\$300 billion to stabilize their K-12 education budgets](#) and meet even a portion of the additional costs over the next year and a half.

^[12] This estimate focuses on what is needed for safety, such as PPE, cleaning materials and staffing, and health supports. It also focuses on providing some resources to expand transportation and instructional capacity. Additional funding beyond \$1.6 billion will be needed to make up for the revenue losses caused by COVID-19, which threaten schools with the loss of almost a million jobs. Our estimate also includes the costs of providing greater supports for children, both to address the social and emotional strains they are under and to help those who need better technology solutions to make the distance learning component more effective and more equitable. We call on the Senate and administration to pass the HEROES Act so that states and districts have the funding they need. Without this funding, our economy and a generation of children will be lost. For more numbers, read the AFT's report, "[A Time to Act: The Importance of Investment in Public Education and Other State and Local Services in the Time of COVID-19.](#)"



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400



aft.org



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