

Unions Representing 48,000+ Washington, DC Metro Area Public School Educators Demand Immediate Action From Political Leaders for Unified, Safe Return to In-Person Instruction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year in our communities was devastating for hundreds of thousands of public school students, their families, and their dedicated teachers and school support staff. Teachers across the larger Washington, DC metro area have fought to mitigate the disproportionate impact the pandemic has been having particularly on our Black and brown students, students with special needs, and students from low income families - groups already faced with major systemic inequities within the educational system. Public health experts predict rates of COVID-19 infections will continue to rise to new peaks in the coming days and weeks as vaccine distribution lags nationally.

With the current surge spiking, and vaccine access months away for the vast majority of the public, there is great uncertainty for hundreds of thousands of public school students across the larger capital area about school reopening plans. We live in one of the most populous regions of America. The lack of a coordinated plan among the many school districts in the region is creating instability and unnecessary anxiety for parents, children, and school employees in the Washington, DC metro area.

Immediate coordination and a coherent uniform plan that is consistent across school systems in the larger Washington, DC area is urgently needed to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic and to resume in-person instruction here. We cannot afford disparate and inconsistent approaches to reopening school facilities - schools in the Washington, DC metro area need one plan that protects us all equally.

Parents (some of whom are also school employees) are concerned about securing childcare on short notice at a time when many are already struggling with financial instability from job loss or underemployment. In many cases, schools have reopened haphazardly only to shut down again as COVID cases are discovered there, causing confusion and instability, disrupting learning and family life further.

On top of this, many school buildings across the greater capital region cannot adequately protect against COVID-19 or meet CDC recommendations in their current conditions. There must be a concerted regional effort to ensure that when all educational facilities reopen they all will have appropriate air quality management, as well as adequate sanitizing supplies and PPE for staff and students. Without one core set of standards and practices, disadvantaged school districts will fall even further behind - and our students deserve better than that.

Educators and school employees in the region are eager to return to school buildings and in-person instruction, but we must put the safety of our communities first. We implore the school districts in the Washington, DC metro area to commit to providing distance learning until reasonable health metrics are met, until a unified vaccine distribution plan is in place for educators across our region, and until they can adhere to the CDC safety guidelines and all applicable health and safety laws.

We, the more than 48,000 workers who educate, transport, feed, and ensure the well being of the Washington, DC region's hundreds of thousands of children, call on the school leaders of the DC Metro area to create a single, sensible, and safe plan for returning to in-person instruction. Please give everyone in our region the relief of knowing that in these uncertain times we are doing everything possible to reduce anxiety regarding safety and prevent the needless loss of human life during a global pandemic. To succeed, we must unite in our efforts to recover from the sustained trauma and suffering this pandemic has caused in our communities.

In unity,

- Prince George's County Educators' Association
- Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO
- Baltimore Teachers Union
- Arlington Education Association
- Fairfax Education Association
- Loudoun Education Association
- Prince William Education Association
- Education Association of Alexandria
- Montgomery County Education Association
- ACE-AFSCME Local 250
- Washington Teachers Union