



Honorable Governor Eric Holcomb
Office of the Governor
200 W. Washington St., Rm. 206
Indianapolis, IN 46204

July 29, 2020

Dear Governor Holcomb:

First, thank you for your action requiring face masks and the new classroom-level guidance provided to schools in the event a student or adult should become infected with COVID-19. We hope these steps will reduce the rate of infection and save lives.

Unfortunately, since our July 14 meeting, the infection rate has increased in Indiana and across the country. Many schools have been forced to push back start dates or move to online learning for the start of the new school year. It remains unclear as to why one school would open as planned and another, just miles away, has pushed back its start date. Also, school restart plans vary dramatically across the state and some lack sufficient safety and health protocols and strategies. The lack of transparent standards has only exacerbated the fear and anxiety that educators, students and parents are experiencing.

We urge you to issue specific guidelines for closing and opening school buildings during this pandemic. We believe that these guidelines should address each of the points listed below. All reflect policies our local associations pushed for with their local administrations. Many have been implemented, but significant inconsistency exists across the state.

The Covid-19 pandemic must be under control in the community served by the school before in-person learning is permitted.

Specific protections must be put in place in all schools to keep the virus under control and protect students and staff.

Plans are in place to ensure continuous learning for all students.

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The Covid-19 pandemic must be under control in the community served by the school before in-person learning is allowed.

Leading public health experts agree that reopening school buildings for in-person learning must wait until transmission rates in the community are both low and declining over at least the past two weeks as measured by key indicators such as infection rates, hospitalization rates and hospital capacity. Otherwise, reopening school and school buildings may spur a resurgence of the virus in the community. Of course, there are some areas of the state where the pandemic is under control and schools should reopen. In other communities where the virus is not under control, schools should move to online learning until control is achieved.

Specific protections must be put in place in all schools to keep the virus under control and protect students and staff, including:

- **Accommodations:** High-risk students, staff and families are protected through appropriate accommodations such as remote learning and instruction arrangements.
- **Distancing:** All necessary steps have been taken to maintain six-foot physical distance among all students, staff and visitors throughout the day including, where necessary, class size reductions, reconfiguring classrooms and readjusting school schedules and traffic patterns. Safe school-sponsored transportation must also be provided including reconfiguring school buses and transportation schedules to allow for distancing.
- **Deterrence:** Strong deterrence measures have been put in place, including:
 - continuing the requirement that everyone wear appropriate face coverings and that the employer provide those face coverings.
 - a requirement that students, staff and visitors wash their hands for 20 seconds several times a day and, where doing so is not possible, are provided with hand-sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol.
 - plexiglass protections are installed where necessary.
 - heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems are inspected and, if necessary, retrofitted or modified to increase air flow, air filtration and the circulation of clean air.
 - sufficient classroom supplies and consumables are provided so each student has their own.
- **Deep Cleaning:** Thorough protocols are in place for daily cleaning and disinfecting of school and campus buildings and buses, as well as more frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces and frequently used areas such as restrooms. Staff have been trained and provided the necessary PPE to perform the cleaning and disinfecting tasks safely.

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- **Detection:** Procedures are in place to detect COVID-19 cases among students, staff, and visitors, including education on symptoms, requiring those who are sick to stay home, isolation of symptomatic individuals and closing school buildings to contain potential outbreaks.
- **Quarantine, Isolation and Notification Procedures:** Triggers for school closures to in-person instruction are clear to families and staff. A protocol is in place that provides for notification of individuals exposed in school to someone with COVID-19, for immediate isolation of that person, and quarantines of those who have been exposed. Robust plans exist for continuity of instruction through substitutes or other instruction when teachers must quarantine or when in-person instruction must be closed. During any such closure, continuity of instruction, nutrition and support services for all students must be provided.
- **Educator and Family Involvement:** Procedures are in place to ensure educators and families have a voice in how the return to in-person instruction occurs and how necessary protections function throughout the school year. Potential avenues for educator and family input include district- and building-level health and safety committees and, where possible, collective bargaining.
- **Monitoring:** Health and safety protections are independently enforced through regular, unannounced building inspections by local health authorities and a widely publicized hotline to report violations. Whistleblowers must be protected against any and all retaliation or adverse actions.
- **Enforcement:** Clear policies are established for how protective measures will be enforced consistently, ensuring that disparate discipline of students or staff does not occur.

Plans are in place to ensure continuous learning for all students.

- There is a plan for instruction (whether in-person or virtual) that addresses racial and social equity in the provision of instruction and support services.
- The plan includes training for educators, families and students on the processes and protocols in the event a COVID-19 outbreak necessitates returning, in whole or in part, to virtual instruction.
- Educators are involved at each step of the planning process for any form of virtual teaching and learning, including adjusting the curriculum and methods of instruction.
- The plan for continuous learning addresses device access for every student, high-speed internet access for every student and educator, and accommodates gaps in such services.

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- The plan ensures sufficient and appropriate staffing to cover the added responsibilities necessary to carry out the plan.

Additionally, we urge you to take steps to increase transparency related to COVID-19 and schools and do more to support families.

- All school reopening plans should be housed in a central online location and made easily available to the public. This will help parents and educators understand what steps are being taken to address COVID-19 challenges and provide greater accountability for the decisions that have been made and will need to be made in the months ahead.
- School-related COVID-19 infection rates should be included on the state COVID-19 data dashboard. Without this, rumors and false information will continue to stoke fear and anxiety.
- We understand the heavy burden our families feel when schools are unable to provide in-person learning. Because of this, we all need to do more to support families with children during this crisis. Developing innovative childcare opportunities and financial resources to working parents to secure adequate childcare during temporary school closures.
- Find ways to repurpose schools during temporary closures to provide additional support to parents who may struggle with the challenges of distance education. ISTA stands ready to help with these or similar initiatives designed to support parents and children during temporary closures.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Gambill', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Keith Gambill
President
Indiana State Teachers Association

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