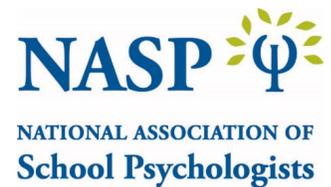


Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASP Statement on Reopening Schools for In-Person Learning

Bethesda, MD—The decision to return to in-person instruction in our nation’s schools must be driven by a principle of least harm, guided by reliable public health data, and it must consider the needs of students, families, and staff. The decision must not be made on the basis of political expediency and the elevation of economic concerns over the safety of students, staff, and the community.

Demands from government officials, including Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, that call for the full-scale reopening of schools and threaten the withholding of funds without consideration for local conditions and capacity undermines the trust that communities have placed in public schools throughout our history. For schools to reopen safely, there must be attention to each school building’s physical design (e.g., ventilation systems, capacity for social distancing, access to supplies needed to prevent the spread of disease), the educational and health needs of students and staff, and the capacity of schools to meet those needs. The “one size fits all” and “open or else” statements of the Trump administration and other government officials fail to acknowledge the complexity of the current situation and the ethical responsibility of educators to do no harm. For school leaders to meet the complex demands of this crisis, they must be empowered by not just words but also by evidence-based guidance and the substantial financial investments necessary to ensure that our nation’s schools can safely return to in-person education.

If we are serious about returning to in-person instruction, we first must prioritize lowering rates of community spread. Public health officials are best equipped to direct these efforts. Unless significant reduction in community transmission has been accomplished, a return to in-person schooling will result in unnecessary illness and death. Schools that return to in-person learning in communities with a high level of transmission will be placed in an impossible position. They likely will face the need to close again because of outbreaks and will be blamed for an entirely predictable failure.

Even in communities that are successfully controlling the virus, in-person schooling will require new and substantial financial investment. We must commit to providing schools with the funding they have repeatedly asked for to ensure that they have the resources required to implement CDC guidelines and protect the health of students and staff. Funds will be needed upgrade facilities for

better ventilation, distancing, and sanitation. Funding is also needed to ensure adequate staffing levels and the availability of the full range of academic, social–emotional, and mental and behavioral health services to all students. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly had an impact on the mental and behavioral wellness of many students and staff. Without additional investments, districts will be forced to lay off teachers, school-employed mental health professionals, nurses, and other specialized instructional support personnel. Districts are laying off employees at a time when we need more, not fewer, educators in our schools to support our students and families.

Preparations must be made to support staff members' ability to work. Funds will be needed to cover extended sick leaves for infected staff. There need to be clear, appropriate policies for quarantine leaves, both for individual staff who must quarantine or leave to care for sick family members and for all personnel if schools have to close to manage outbreaks. Additional staff must be hired to manage the complex academic and mental health needs described above.

We understand and fully support the value that in-person instruction provides to students, families, and communities. We also are deeply concerned that the costs of this pandemic are inequitably borne by communities of color and that keeping schools closed for in-person instruction could negatively impact low income and economically marginalized communities the most. These problems are real and devastating. However, it is unconscionable to place children, families, and staff at even greater risk by returning to in-person learning while failing to provide the necessary conditions for success.

The COVID-19 pandemic is challenging every aspect of American life. The solutions should not require sacrificing the health and safety of America's children and the adults who have dedicated their lives to supporting their education.

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