



For Immediate Release:

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**Educators and School Staff Urge Action to Assure
“Safe, Healthy Return to the Classroom”**

Board of Education Union Coalition leaders call on state to enact specific protocols ahead of students’ return from winter break

Hartford – With double-digit infection rates, rises in pediatric cases, backlogs at testing facilities, and shortages of testing kits, the Board of Education (BOE) Union Coalition is calling for new, more stringent safety standards and protocols to reflect the situation we’re in and further prevent the pandemic from tightening its grip on Connecticut’s schools and communities.

We all agree that in-person learning is best for our students, but we must ensure that children, teachers, and staff return after the holiday break to safe schools, and we urge the state to:

- 1) Adopt new, more aggressive testing protocols to closely monitor students and teachers before they enter our schools. As in other facilities, temperatures should be taken outside and anyone with a fever or exhibiting symptoms should not be allowed into our schools;
- 2) Provide cost-free access to COVID-19 testing at all schools, including weekly pool testing;
- 3) Provide N95 masks and in-home test kits to all school districts for distribution to students and school staff;
- 4) Require N95 masks be worn in school by all, regardless of vaccination status;
- 5) Continue with other established mitigation efforts including social distancing, no large group gatherings, and improved ventilation;
- 6) Prohibit the combining of classes due to staff shortages;
- 7) Prohibit the unsuccessful practice of dual teaching;
- 8) Provide access to COVID-19 vaccinations at all schools; and
- 9) Ensure that staff do not have to use their sick time during quarantine periods.

The BOE Union Coalition, representing over 60,000 public education employees across Connecticut, is calling for the implementation of these protocols before schools reopen next week to create a stable and safe learning environment for our students and staff. We must also have every option available to us, including the opportunity for distance learning, to maintain continuity for our children.

While the vast majority of Connecticut's teachers and public school staff (more than 93%) are vaccinated, they, like the rest of the general population, are experiencing breakthrough COVID infections. At this continued rate of spread a shortage of teachers, paras, bus drivers and other essential school staff is likely, which would lead to intermittent closings and cause additional problems for parents and communities.

With New Year's celebrations yet to come, and further increases in positivity rates expected, safety must continue to be our top priority - everyone needs to be part of that equation. Parents, students, and community members must double down on safety protocols to reduce community spread. That means getting vaccinated and boosted, testing, masking, social distancing, avoiding large gatherings, and taking other steps to minimize risk.

We must all return to the successful safety protocols we relied on earlier in the pandemic to reduce community spread. It is also vital that dedicated staff not lose wages due to work-related quarantines or a return to a virtual environment. We cannot afford to lose any of the well-trained and knowledgeable staff that have helped carry our students through the pandemic.

As our teachers and staff prepare to welcome their students back to school after a much-needed break, we all must be partners in ensuring a safe, healthy return to the classroom.

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The Board of Education Union Coalition represents over 60,000 public school employees (teachers and non-certified education personnel) across the state and includes members in the following labor federations and their affiliated unions: AFSCME, AFT Connecticut, CEA, CSEA SEIU Local 2001, CEUI, MEUI, and UAW.

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