



Position Statement on School Reopening: “100% Remote” is the Best Option to Reduce Community Spread

The term “reopening” is being used in the media to mean students returning to in-person schooling. Schools leaders are facing political and economic pressure to “reopen” their campuses for in-person schooling during an active, deadly, and currently growing pandemic.

The Educator Collaborative believes that empirical scientific evidence and public health expertise are essential to safe school reopening plans. While much is being learned about the novel coronavirus in real time, there is clear public health consensus (including from the CDC, NIH, FDA, American Medical Association, Mayo Clinic, Harvard Medical School, Johns Hopkins, UN, WHO, and others) that COVID-19 is passed primarily through the spread of water droplets when people are in close proximity with one another and/or are together in enclosed spaces for a prolonged period and talk, sing, cough, sneeze, or breathe into the air.

As these descriptions are a hallmark of schools, a move too quickly toward in-person schooling, or without the ability to sustain stringent medical guidelines, directly puts educators, non-instructional staff, children, families, and other community members in danger of contracting the virus.

We believe school reopening decisions directly impact the virus’ disparate effects on Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. Due to overlapping inequities within our healthcare, schooling, and employment systems, the presence of coronavirus will more directly impact these communities (Mayo Clinic: [“Coronavirus infection by race: What’s behind the health disparities?”](#); The Atlantic: [COVID Racial Data Tracker](#); The Lancet: [“Indigenous populations: left behind in the COVID-19 response”](#)).

These effects are not limited to adult populations, wide disparities exist in the severity of COVID-19 infections in children: “hispanic children were hospitalized at a rate eight times higher than white kids, and Black children were hospitalized at a rate five times higher” (AP: [“US reports show racial disparities in kids with COVID-19”](#)).

School leaders must contend with these realities, regardless of the demographics of their specific school population, as schools exist within communities where people frequent communal services such as grocery stores, restaurants, medical services, libraries and other public spaces. If schools drive up infection rates, the schools will drive inequitable complications and deaths. Conversely, if schools actively suppress COVID-19 spread, through thoughtful policies, they will help to protect lives within their communities and beyond.

We believe that “100% remote” learning, while imperfect, is the safest learning structure currently available and one that schools should choose to protect the greatest number of students, families, educators, and members of the public.

The CDC, in their “[Considerations for Schools](#)” (May 2020), notes “the more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread.” In addition, it notes that the only “lowest risk” structure is when “students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.”

We understand that the closure of physical schooling across the U.S. was and continues to be key to limiting community spread. We believe that this pandemic, like previous, will come to an end if the public acts decisively. Protecting the public health, by tamping down the spread of COVID-19, is a critical goal whose benefits outweigh the shorter term challenges.

We recognize that the emergency remote learning that took place in spring 2020, with very little time for preparation or support, was inadequate and lacking (Chalkbeat: “[America’s great remote-learning experiment: What surveys of teachers and parents tell us about how it went](#)”). This however, is not a given. We believe districts’ intellectual, emotional, and financial resources ought to be spent creating the most equitable remote structures possible, devising safe ways to support children experiencing disabilities that may require some in-person services, and supporting educators in building capacity around effective, and engaging remote pedagogy and social-emotional responsive care.

Resources

Call Congress and tell them to Fund Schools and Universal Broadband Access

- Congressional Switchboard (use your zip code): (202) 224-3121
- “Resist Bot” (send faxes via text messaging) text “Resist” to 50409

Contact Your School or District

- [Covid Parent Letter](#), a template for families to write to their schools by educators Alison Collins, Sarah Gross, Julie Jee, Stacey Shubitz

Share a Model School Reopening Phased Plan with Safety Prerequisites

- Urban Assembly Maker Academy High School’s Phased Reopening Proposal
 - [Letter and links to resources](#)
 - [Phased Proposal slide deck](#)

