



Arizona
Education
Association

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Governor Ducey,

Enough is enough. COVID-19 cases are on the rise again here in Arizona, and it is well past time for you to act in the best interest of our children and educators. Not only have you failed to take additional action to address the rising cases statewide, but in the face of those cases the Arizona Department of Health Services last week unilaterally changed their guidance on benchmarks for transitioning between in-person instruction and distance learning. And worse, you indicated that it was done so at the request of educators, and then repeatedly refused to identify who made the request.

Arizona teachers and staff again feel they and their students are being put at increased risk. The ADHS action seemed secretive, and coupled with your unsubstantiated claim that educators requested the change has left teachers and staff with little trust that anyone is concerned about their well-being. We need to rebuild trust by creating a statewide plan that is transparent and accountable, prioritizes school safety, and ensures our students and educators have access to safe and just schools.

To that end the Arizona Education Association once again requests that you meet with us to hear the reality of our classrooms and campuses and to hear our ideas for a statewide plan that prioritizes the health and safety of our students and school staff, our families, and our communities. Educators are resourceful and know there are ways to ensure that safety is at the forefront of educating our students. We request that you hear directly from classroom teachers and those educators who directly support students about what needs to be done to provide safe learning environments during this unprecedented school year.

On August 21st, the Arizona Education Association sent you a letter calling for a statewide plan regarding school safety. It has been over two months since we made this request and still there has been no action by your office toward this important goal. Our educators and our students need consistency and stability in order to feel their schools are safe. As stated in our previous letter and in keeping with the priority safety for Arizona’s children, the statewide plan should:

- Mandate masks be worn statewide in schools and on buses until the end of the school year.
- Require safety protocols for school districts regarding COVID-19 exposure notification plans for employees and students.
- Provide the additional funding necessary to ensure that our public schools open to in-person learning can sustain the safe and healthy learning environments needed for our students to excel.
- Cancel this year’s high-stakes standardized testing due to the disruptions related to COVID-19 rendering scores unreliable for the 2020-2021 school year.
- Grant school districts flexibility toward meeting the requirement of 180 days of instruction due to impacts related to COVID-19.

AEA’s MISSION

*AEA...
keeping the
promise of
quality
public
education*

In the months since requesting this statewide plan it has become clear that the system in place now is not working, is not safe, and is not sustainable. We've waited too long for action from you, and it has left schools, educators, students, and parents with too much uncertainty and an inability to take action to further protect students and educators. That is why we are also calling for a statewide plan that will ensure safety measures are being implemented through:

- Inspections of school buildings, prioritizing ventilation and HVAC systems
- Reporting mechanisms for noncompliance of statewide safety measures

The lack of a statewide plan is exacerbating our shortage of classroom teachers and staff willing to work during this pandemic. Most educators are also parents, and as such know that parents are also struggling with how best to support and protect their children. Educators, parents, and students need a plan for safe schools that doesn't jeopardize their health or the health of their family or community.

All Arizona students deserve access to safe and just schools. There is an opportunity to ensure that can be met during this pandemic. By having a statewide plan to address COVID-19 in our public schools we can ensure students and staff are in spaces we can say are safe and include funding to mitigate risks of exposure to and spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

The time for waiting is over. Arizonans need you to take action now. We are here and ready to work with you on a statewide approach that ensures all educators and students have access to safe and just schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph H. Thomas", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Joseph H. Thomas, President
Arizona Education Association