

Statement on Safe and Equitable Schooling during COVID-19

COVID has deeply affected all of us. The [current situation in schools](#) is severely impacting student learning and teachers' ability to teach. One educator said of the Omicron wave, "This is the closest to systems failure I've seen during this pandemic."

Forcing all students and school staff to be in-person without proper protection does not allow them to thrive, let alone meet their basic needs for safety. Schooling as we are currently attempting to do it is creating an insurmountable level of exhaustion, stress, and trauma for everyone in our school communities. If we don't make significant changes to sustain our school staff, we won't have anyone to support our students in the future. Nearly one [in four teachers](#) were considering quitting their job at the end of the 2020-2021 school year as compared to one in six teachers before the pandemic.

We have an opportunity to profoundly transform our schools and take our approach to equitable education deeper than ever before because it quite literally is life or death. We need to center the needs of different students and families.

Equality All students have in-person learning
Students with disabilities, students who are immunocompromised, etc. are left behind without access to schooling



Equity All students have the option to attend in-person learning and remote learning
All students have access to the schooling that best meets their needs



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Equity is not the same as equality. Equity is giving students exactly what they need in order to access a high quality education. Students with disabilities or students who live in multigenerational households or with immunocompromised individuals may need to be learning

from home in order to meet their educational needs. Students with working parents may need to be at school (even when it's unsafe) because of a lack of paid medical or sick leave that would enable families to make a different choice. It's no secret that economic concerns have routinely been placed above concerns for human health throughout the pandemic.

To achieve true equity, there needs to be an option for in-person learning *and* remote learning. For some, keeping schools open is essential. And when we ask teachers and students to be in school we need to provide them with the testing, N95 masks, and proper ventilation to keep them safe. There also needs to be a plan in place for students and teachers whose current educational and health needs are best met through online instruction. These changes must be supported at the state level. We cannot expect schools and teachers to magically make this happen on their own.

The Education Justice Coalition of Vermont stands with the demands of [Vermont School Workers United](#) who call on Governor Phil Scott and the Secretary of Education Dan French to:

- Continue to provide free weekly in-school testing for ALL students and staff
- Increase in-school testing to twice a week in all schools until surge decreases
- Provide high quality KN-95 masks (or equivalent) for all students and staff
- Ensure upgraded ventilation and any other measures to mitigate airborne transmission
- Ensure schools have the resources needed to continue contact tracing protocols (including hiring more staff, if needed)
- If there is not capacity for contact tracing protocols, this is a sign that schools need to be closed temporarily to contain spread
- Issue a statewide indoor mask mandate to curb community transmission
- Allow districts to temporarily transition to hybrid or remote learning until the measures above can be put in place

Along with these demands, the Education Justice Coalition of Vermont strongly believes that there should be the ongoing option to access in-person and online learning given the different needs of working families, students with disabilities, multilingual students, and more. At the same time, we recognize there may be cases where schools need to be temporarily closed for health and safety reasons.

In order to increase health, safety, and learning opportunities for students and school staff, please [sign this petition](#).