



## Cincinnati Federation of Teachers “Our Lives, Our Safety” Resolution on Reopening Schools

(Approved May 7, 2020)

**Whereas** COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus that is passed from person to person from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, or by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes, and

**Whereas** everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19, and older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more severe illness, and

**Whereas** there is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, and the CDC states the best way to protect oneself and others is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 by 1) staying home as much as possible and avoiding close contact with others, 2) wearing a cloth face covering that covers your nose and mouth in public settings, 3) cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, and 4) washing one’s hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, and

**Whereas** the CDC reports a disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups; and that existing health disparities make members of racial and ethnic minority groups especially vulnerable in public health emergencies like outbreaks of COVID-19, and that social and economic conditions can put students and employees at a higher risk for getting sick from COVID-19, and that Cincinnati Public School is an urban district that serves families who are ethnically diverse, and that serves a majority of students who are of low and moderate family incomes, and

**Whereas** the World Health Organization reports that globally, about 3.4% of reported COVID-19 patients have died, and that by comparison, seasonal flu generally kills fewer than 1% of those infected, and

**Whereas** Ohio’s Governor is likely to order schools to reopen for the 2020-2021 school year before there is an available vaccine, and

**Whereas** the 2019 Cincinnati Public School Strategic Plan has five goals, and the second goal is “Health and Safety” and states “We focus on personal wellbeing: We will commit to putting the safety, physical, social, and emotional health of our students, staff, and partners at the forefront of everything we do,” and that the CFT underscores we must take every precaution to ensure that students and staff are safe at school and not transmitting the virus, and

**Whereas** CFT convened a ‘CFT COVID-19 Taskforce’ that collected input from CPS staff using focus group interviews and an online survey where 526 employees responded with their concerns and solutions for a safe return to in-school instruction, and

**Whereas** CPS should engage teachers and support staff at every level of the decision-making process to ensure that the mitigation strategies embedded in reopening plans are responsive to the specific vulnerabilities of each school site, and that there is regular and open communication regarding the policies and procedures to keep everyone safe, and

**Whereas** without transparency and joint decision-making, there is a real risk of distrust, the spread of misinformation, and a lack of compliance with the reopening plan, and,

**Whereas** CPS should provide genuine participation, communication, and buy-in from those who are ultimately responsible for ensuring the health and safety of our students: our teachers and support staff, who will face great risks in transitioning to reopening, and their voices should be treated as a public health resource, not a liability;

**Therefore, be it resolved that,** the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers exhorts the Board of Education and CPS Administration to address our concerns below in the Cincinnati Public Schools District's reopening plan, and that the CPS District should include CFT members in their reopening plan to ensure a safe return to in-school instruction for all staff and students.

Our concerns include the following:

## **1. Communications**

- a) CPS should review the systems that are already in place to communicate closures and delays (i.e., weather delays) to determine if they suffice for COVID-19 communications. All families have a legal right to important information from the school in a language they understand; therefore, all parent and community communication shall not only be in English but also in the three most prevalent languages of our students and families at the same time, to the greatest extent possible.
- b) Communications must explain why the District is taking an action. For example, have COVID-19 cases already been identified within the district or community, or is the communication largely a preventative measure?
- c) CPS needs to develop clear protocols for communicating with students, parents, and staff who have come into close/sustained contact with confirmed cases.
- d) The District should share with CFT communications related to COVID-19 before it is shared with the public.
- e) CPS needs a quarantine procedure for closing classrooms or schools.
- f) When addressing COVID-19 prevention, School Handbooks should include images and videos, clear guidelines, and expectations in multiple languages where applicable.

## **2. Health and Hygiene Measures**

- a) The District, in coordination with local and state public health departments, must trace the contacts of infected employees and students and remove exposed employees from work with pay and without retaliation. The District must have readily available access to COVID-19 testing, tracking, and tracing for students and employees.
- b) The District must have a plan for every student and employee to have their temperature taken as they enter the building. An Isolation Room at each school site needs to be identified for students who are waiting for dismissal due to COVID-19.

- c) Personal protective equipment and sanitization is essential. This includes providing masks and gloves, and disinfecting schools on a regular basis, in addition to providing hand washing and sanitizing stations.
- d) Education and training for all employees must be provided on how to properly put on, use, take off, and dispose of PPE.
- e) Adequate education for all school personnel to know and recognize the most likely symptoms of COVID-19, and how to protect employees and students from transmission.
- f) The school nurse is an essential member on pandemic preparedness, re-opening, and re-entry planning teams. School nurses are needed on the front lines of exposure to students who are sick or who are asymptomatic but infectious. Schools should have nurses at every work site, all day and every day.
- g) Secretaries and Lunchroom Workers should have a protective barrier between themselves and the students.
- h) School facilities should be thoroughly sanitized on a daily basis to prevent transmission of the virus, increasing staff as necessary
- i) Updated cleaning guidelines must be established, not just for custodial staff, but for employees throughout the building.
- j) Effective accountability systems for cleaning must be developed, monitored, and enforced. Employees need to be able to communicate and have health and hygiene concerns responded to quickly.
- k) Messaging to students upon their return regarding continual reminders to wash hands, not share food and drinks, follow PDA rules, etc. should be systematically provided throughout the school in multiple languages.
- l) Hand-washing stations and protocol: CPS must install hand sanitizer "stations" in every classroom
- m) Schools should set up hand-washing stations at the entrance to school buildings. Hand-washing recesses can be integrated into the schedule throughout the day for all students and staff.

### **3. Facilities/ Building Utilization Plans**

- a) Every CPS worksite must have a building utilization plan for the reopening of schools that is developed and approved by the ILT.
- b) CPS must plan to adjust class sizes to accommodate social distancing. This may include staggered schedules.
- c) Mealtimes and PPE logistics will have to be planned for, given many schools are already in overcrowded cafeterias.
- d) CPS must improve ventilation by ridding all schools of contaminants by maximizing both the outside air intake and each building's air exhaust. CPS must improve filtration by increasing the MERV rating of filters currently being used. By doing this, more airborne pollutants will be removed from the air. Filters will be changed on a more frequent basis.

- e) CPS should consider various actions related to HVAC systems to reduce the spread of the virus recommended by experts, such as increasing outdoor ventilation, disabling demand-controlled ventilation (DCV), further open minimum outdoor air dampers as high as 100% thus eliminating recirculation, improve central air filtration, keep systems running longer hours, of possible 24/7, consider portable room air cleaners with HEPA filters.

#### **4) Hybrid In-school/Remote Learning**

- a) It is critical that the remote learning experiences our students engage in, take into account their individual needs and hold them accountable to meet or exceed the learning outcomes for the courses they are taking. District guidelines and expectations for remote learning should be collaboratively developed and monitored by the Education Initiatives Panel, and clearly communicated to each building. A building specific Remote Learning Plan that includes staff professional development in remote learning practices, should be developed and approved by ILT and 2/3rds of the staff. These plans should be consistent with the district guidelines and expectations, as well as the District's Board of Education and CFT Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- b) Students and families need access to the internet and devices that may need to be provided by the school system. We need ITM training for staff who will be supporting families using the technology.
- a) If longer-term hybrid/remote learning models are instituted for certain grade levels within CPS upon the reopening of buildings, a reassessment of student technology needs should be conducted.
- b) Expanded access to broadband and technology is needed to close the digital divide. Districts should identify students and educators who lack sufficient access to the internet and the hardware that has become critical to distance learning, and determine solutions for equal access to learning opportunities for those who are unable to connect with the school digitally. Families may be reluctant to register with Internet providers and registration procedures may be complex. Some of the free Internet connections from providers require a Social Security Number and no past due payments.
- c) Ohio state testing, State diagnostic assessments including those for Preschool and ELL, District instructional assessments, nationally norm-referenced standardized tests, and college preparatory exams, need to be limited.

#### **5) Attendance Policies for Students, Staff, and Substitute Teachers**

- a) CPS needs to communicate consistent routines and expectations with clear and timely results and consequences; a clear attendance and grading policy must hold students and teachers accountable for online meetings and assignments.
- b) CPS needs to allow people to work from home and/or restructure work to minimize the number of workers physically present in a workspace.
- c) English Learners depend on routines to meet expectations; if explanations are not clear, because they are delivered in a second language, then consistent procedures are needed to provide a bridge to academic performance and engagement.
- d) ESL enrollment is typically done in person with many delays due to a need for native language support, confusion with the school, bus systems, and more. If the district doesn't have the numbers at normal TAC time, the District must be supportive of the placement of projected numbers because the need to

have those teachers will remain, especially since we will have to have more targeted support to advance students from lost learning time.

- e) CPS must better incentivize substitute teachers to address our shortage.

## **6) Social-Emotional Learning/Mental Health**

- a) Teachers know that kids will not learn if they do not feel safe. CPS must plan to increase the educational and social-emotional supports our students need. We must be prepared for the trauma, the transition, and the many instructional issues—including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide

## **7) Transportation modifications**

- a) Cincinnati Metro should provide photos and/or videos of new bus procedures to familiarize students and families before return to school on subjects such as how to pay a driver behind plexiglass, and what is the restricted seating.
- b) Yellow Buses must sanitize between routes and ensure social distancing of students on routes.
- c) Students will have their temperature taken prior to getting on Yellow Buses and will have their hands sanitized.

## **8) Preschool and Special Needs Students**

- a) CPS serves special populations including students with special needs, and preschool children. There are special considerations that must be included in the reopen plan. For example, CPS preschools have Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) rules on student-teacher ratios, and currently the ODJFS Pandemic Centers have 5 children and one adult, or 6 per room. Changes such as no tooth-brushing or family-style eating, and frequent shared learning materials must be considered. Supplies are needed for this age group such as covers for cots.
- b) For students with special needs, they will require larger classrooms or staggered attendance to maintain social distancing and may need additional PPE such as face shields. Some students may not be able to tolerate wearing masks or be able to maintain the social distance requirement within a small classroom environment. Severely handicapped students may be unable to be cared for under social distancing,
- c) The overuse of bleach and other such highly reactive cleaners could cause unexpected allergy-reactions and/or respiratory problems in special needs students who already suffer from respiratory and/or allergy issues. The District will need to know who (students and employees) has respiratory issues and what reactions they may have to cleaning agents.

## **9) Sick Leave and Pre-Existing Health Conditions**

- a) The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique challenges for teachers and staff with limited sick days available and/or pre-existing health conditions that make them and/or those they live with particularly vulnerable to the disease. While reopened schools must be fully staffed, the risk of infection and a possible new wave of COVID-related cases will expose teachers to an increased risk of illness and even death until an effective vaccine or therapy for treatment is broadly available.

- b) To address those concerns, CFT/CFOP and CPS should enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would address the current threat in a way that mirrors the rights of teachers who must take off time due to a student assault. The MOU would:
- Allow employees leave with pay without loss of sick days if suffering from COVID-19 or any complications from COVID-19;
  - Allow employees leave with pay without loss of sick days if ordered to quarantine by the district or by a public health official because they have been exposed to someone infected by COVID-19.
  - Require the District to make reasonable efforts to accommodate the working conditions of employees with pre-existing medical conditions which make them more vulnerable to COVID-19, such as diabetes, compromised immune system, asthma or other cardio-vascular disease, in a fashion similar to the district's obligation to teachers with disabilities.
  - Assure that any testing for COVID infection or for COVID anti-bodies required by the District or prescribed by the teacher's physician would not be at the expense of the employee.
  - Because of pre-existing health conditions, some teachers may not feel comfortable returning to work for the 20-21 school year until a vaccine is available. These teachers should be allowed to take a leave without pay for the entire year and return to their old positions in 21-22. Health benefits under the Board group plan would continue with the Board paying the full cost of health insurance coverage less the employee contribution.
  - The MOU would be for the 2020-21 school year, subject to negotiation for renewal for an additional year in May 2021, depending on the status of the COVID threat at that time.

#### Sources:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): "What you should know about COVID-19 to protect yourself and others" <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): "COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups" <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT): "A Plan To Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities: Guidance for imagining a new normal for public education, public health and our economy in the age of COVID-19" [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19\\_reopen-america-schools.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19_reopen-america-schools.pdf)

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 3 March 2020 - World Health Organization, March 3, 2020 <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---3-march-2020>

Our Community-Designed Strategic Plan: A Roadmap to Destination Cincinnati Public Schools [https://www.cps-k12.org/sites/www.cps-k12.org/files/pdfs/BOE\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Final\\_Web.pdf](https://www.cps-k12.org/sites/www.cps-k12.org/files/pdfs/BOE_Strategic_Plan_Final_Web.pdf)

*ASHRAE Journal Newsletter, March 24, 2020. Lawrence J. Schoen, P.E., "Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic"* <https://www.ashrae.org/news/ashraejournal/guidance-for-building-operations-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

National Association of School Nurses, April 29, 2020 "Interim Guidance: Role of the School Nurse in Return to School Planning" [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/COVID-19 Interim Guidance Role of the School Nurse in Return to School Planning.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/COVID-19%20Interim%20Guidance%20Role%20of%20the%20School%20Nurse%20in%20Return%20to%20School%20Planning.pdf)