



Throughout the pandemic, PAGE has consistently encouraged all Georgia school districts to accommodate educators and students who have documented high-risk health conditions. We acknowledge that current Georgia Department of Public Health guidelines requiring that non-essential workers quarantine for 14 days after close contact with COVID-19 have contributed to staffing challenges in some school districts. However, in order to prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and families, PAGE strongly urges state and local leaders to exercise caution when considering a reclassification of Georgia educators as essential workers or critical infrastructure. Such a reclassification would eliminate educator quarantine requirements following documented close contact exposure to COVID-19, thereby placing Georgia's 1.8 million public school students – and the educators and school personnel who serve them – at greater risk of exposure and infection.

Whether through executive order, public health guidance, or local action, if leaders do consider changes to educator critical infrastructure status, thus eliminating quarantine requirements, policymakers should also consider enacting the following safety protocols, designed to protect the health of students, educators, their families and all within their communities.

1. If local school districts are given authority to designate school staff as essential workers or critical infrastructure, individual educators should retain the ability to opt-out of reclassification. Thus, after any documented close contact with COVID-19, educators who opt-out will quarantine for 14 days, per current DPH guidelines. Educators could continue to contribute through virtual work as their condition and assignment allows.
2. Educators designated as having critical infrastructure status, who do NOT opt out and who have documented close contact with a diagnosed case of COVID-19 shall either:
 - a. Quarantine for three days and thereafter adhere to [CDC work safety guidelines applying to all other Critical Infrastructure employees](#), or
 - b. Undergo a risk-based approach to testing similar to the [CDC testing strategies for COVID-19 in the High Density Critical Infrastructure Workplaces i.e., rapid daily testing](#).
3. A compensated emergency COVID-19 -administrative leave policy should be created for educators who have contracted COVID-19 or are exposed to COVID-19 through a work-related contact and must quarantine. This paid leave type would continue only for the purpose of and the duration of an executive order. Such leave:
 - a. Would not apply unless contact tracing demonstrates an employee contracted the virus at school or was exposed at school or in the performance of duties assigned by the school, leading directly to the implementation of quarantine protocols, and
 - b. Would not apply unless 80 hours of Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) leave is first exhausted.
4. With state support, local school districts should be required to provide a report detailing positive, suspected, and exposure cases on a regular, defined basis and in a manner consistent with other school districts, statewide.

With the goal of opening Georgia public schools in a manner intended to minimize risk for students and staff, PAGE respectfully requests Gov. Kemp's assistance regarding:

- Providing rapid tests for school employees who are exposed at school, allowing for greater assurance that abbreviated quarantine protocols adequately protect others from exposure.
- Funding for costs associated with implementation of compensated emergency COVID-administrative leave.
- Encouraging school districts to grant accommodation for educators with documented high-risk health conditions.
- Empowering the Georgia Department of Education's K-12 Public Health Liaison to work with regional and state public health agencies to ensure adherence to best practices for public health and support virus reporting by local school districts.