

NJ Educators Unite in Call for Statewide Remote School Opening

Dr. Richard Bozza, executive director of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, Patricia Wright, executive director of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and Marie Blistan, president of the New Jersey Education Association, have issued this statement calling on Gov. Murphy and the New Jersey Department of Education to direct all New Jersey public schools to open remotely this fall:

“For months, New Jersey educators and administrators have been working tirelessly to find a way to safely bring students back into school buildings in September. Now, with less than a month remaining before schools are scheduled to reopen, it is time to reluctantly acknowledge that goal is simply not achievable. Reopening schools for in-person instruction under the current conditions poses too great a risk to the health of students and schools staff. The question of whether and when to reopen for in-person instruction is first and foremost a public health decision that cannot be left in the hands of nearly 600 individual school districts. The stakes are too high, and the consequences of a wrong decision are too grave. That is why we are calling on Gov. Murphy and the New Jersey Department of Education to direct all New Jersey public schools to open remotely this fall. We fully support and share the governor’s goal of moving to in-person instruction as soon as the science and data say we can do so responsibly and when the resources are available in our school buildings to do it safely.

“We wish it could be different, but the facts are not in our favor. Our nation is in the middle of an uncontrolled pandemic. Our state, while doing better than many others, has not yet stopped the spread of this virus, particularly among the same young people who are scheduled to return to school in under four weeks. New Jersey’s communities are still at risk, and putting students and staff inside school buildings, even with exceptional precautions, increases that risk.

“We have seen what is happening elsewhere in the country where, within a few days of opening, schools are having to transition to remote learning following outbreaks of COVID-19. Every day, through research and the experience of other states, we are learning more about the effects of this disease on children and their ability to contribute to community spread.

“We have repeatedly asked for universal statewide health standards, which have not been provided. Despite the tireless efforts of all school stakeholders, districts have struggled to meet even the minimum standards that were provided. Inadequate levels of funding, staffing, equipment and facilities will result in inequities in the level of safety afforded to all New Jersey students.

“We urge the governor to act quickly and decisively. We need the rest of the summer to focus our attention and resources on building the most effective remote learning plans possible. While remote education cannot replace in-person instruction, we believe that a carefully planned, well-resourced remote education plan is better than the dangerous, uncertain in-person alternative currently available to us.

“We also need consistent statewide guidance to allow us to focus on addressing critical equity issues. From closing the digital divide to ensuring that students have access to adequate nutrition to figuring out how to provide critical individual therapies and specialized educational services, there will be many challenges ahead. We will be better able to address those issues by all districts starting in a virtual environment, rather than investing our time and scarce resources in a likely unsustainable in-person beginning of the year.

“We remain committed to getting back to in-person instruction as soon as it is safe. It is not safe yet.”

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