



# COUNTY PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL

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**Lisa Palin**  
President  
*Union County*



**Anthony Rosamilia**  
Vice President  
*Essex County*



**Henry Goodhue**  
Secretary-Treasurer  
*Somerset County*



August 12, 2020

To: Governor Phil Murphy  
Kevin Dehmer, Interim Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Education  
Senate President Stephen Sweeney  
Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin

We the undersigned, County President Council members, are members representing 21 counties in the State of New Jersey. In total, we represent 200,000 members of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA). We are sending this letter to express our concerns about reopening schools in the Fall.

Since it was announced on June 26, 2020, that schools will open in the Fall, school districts have met and followed the “The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education” and submitted their plans which were due by July 17th to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). These are unprecedented times and returning to school in the Fall is too soon. Having virtual-only instruction would be safe for everyone.

As you know, COVID-19 cases are on the rise throughout the United States and in New Jersey cases continue to rise and the transmission rate has climbed which caused in-person gatherings to be reduced to 25. If this is happening now, what do you think will happen if schools are open for in-person instruction in the Fall? All it takes is one.

Returning to in-person instruction, students will not maintain social distance especially the small children because they are not able to understand or undertake social distancing. It will be an impossible task to keep them apart. By having to wear a mask for the entire time, that will also be impossible to do. Many of the social distancing and health recommendations we know to be necessary are either impractical or impossible in public school environments.

The guidelines from the NJDOE and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) are unproven and untested. They cannot assure parents that their child(ren) is safe from contracting the virus or bringing it home. The guidelines cannot guarantee that educators will not get sick and die. In a large-scale, systematic study of 65,000 people in South Korea, results found students between the ages of 10 and 19 spread the virus at the same rate as adults. Just recently, 28 Rutgers football players as well as staff members and Major League baseball players tested positive for the COVID-

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19 virus. Reopening schools too early will lead to tragedy in school communities across the state, unraveling the work we have all undertaken to manage the spread of the pandemic.

According to the ASHRAE website, “Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through the air is sufficiently likely that airborne exposure to the virus should be controlled. Changes to building operations including the operation of heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning [HVAC] systems, can reduce airborne exposures.” Many of our school buildings have window unit air conditioning or none at all. Many buildings have outdated HVAC systems that may not meet ASHRAE and EPA guidelines for school reopening.

We understand parents want to resume a sense of normalcy for their children. We want that too but we all need to understand the new realities of classrooms in the age of COVID. We can attest educators have spent the past decade engaged in an effort to emphasize the social and emotional development of our students. We understand now more than ever for students to learn, they must feel safe, welcome, and part of the community. How will they do it with desks spaced 6 ft apart? How will they feel if they are constantly reminded to stay apart from their friends, to not touch their masks, to not share supplies, and keep to their personal space in the classroom? How will it work exactly, with kindergarteners? Many schools will require a “door to door” mask policy. The teacher will be wearing a mask and a face shield. One to one help will be restricted under the guidelines. Group work and labs with shared supplies will not occur. The simple gesture of a reassuring smile or fist bump will vanish. The school day may be abbreviated with students either eating lunch at home, getting a boxed lunch to take home, or eating in their classroom. Going to the bathroom will now require the careful orchestration and logistics of an air traffic controller at the airport. Precious instructional time will be lost to monitor sanitizing and compliance with social distancing and mask-wearing. Socially and emotionally every single person--both students and adults--present in these buildings will be stressed out all the time under these conditions. Yet, even with all these draconian measures, there is still no guarantee that students will be safe from COVID-19.

Lastly, we have faced budget cuts in our locals and there is no Federal or State assistance to provide resources for a safe environment. This creates a large liability for the students and educators. We are asking you, as leaders, to take the next step and support remote learning in the Fall so that during this unprecedented crisis, we can continue to deliver the best quality education that made NJ public schools the best in the nation.



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Respectfully submitted,

*Lisa D. Palin, President, County Presidents' Council and  
Union County Education Association*

*Henry Goodhue, Secretary-Treasurer, County Presidents' Council*

*Andrea Pastore, President, Hudson County Education Association*

*Daniel A. Siegel, First Vice President, Mercer County Education Association*

*Sue Butterfield, President, Passaic County Education Associations*

*Susan Morgan, President, Ocean County Council of Education Associations*

*Grace E. Rarich, Mercer County Education Association President*

*Christopher F. Cannella, He/Him/His pronouns*

*Cedar Grove Education Association President*

*Essex County Education Association Second Vice President*

*Valerie Reynolds, President, Warren County Education Association*

*Dan Epstein, President, Somerset County Education Association*

*John Carlson, Second Vice President, New Jersey Retirees' Education Association*

*Stacey Salerno, President, Cape May County EA*

*Kathy Parker, President, Cape May County EA*

*Christine Candarella, Treasurer, Essex County Education Association*

*Barbara Rheault, President, Atlantic County Council of Education Associations*

*Mildred Johnson, President, Cumberland County Council of Educational  
Associations*

*Nicole Carminati, 1st Vice President, Cumberland County Council of  
Educational Associations*



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*Carmen Porter, Salem County Council of Education Association -1st Vice President*

*Colleen Gilmartin, Salem County Council of Education Association- Secretary and Delegate Assembly*

*Danielle M. Clark, President , Camden County Council of Education Assoc.*

*Jeff Emerson, Vice President , Camden County Council of Education Assoc.*

*Frank Mazzone 1st VP, Hudson County Education Association*

*Denise King, President, Monmouth County Education Association*

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