

Connecticut Releases Full School Reopening Guidelines

by Laurel Killough on June 29, 2020

Connecticut's [school reopening plan](#) released last Thursday was short on specifics. Today the state released its [full 50-page guidelines](#) that provide more details but still leave educators and parents with many questions and concerns.

“We intend to fully analyze the 50-page document released late this afternoon; at first glance it appears incomplete at best. We have yet to find any reference to empowering local or regional districts with the resources clearly needed to implement the sort of in-person learning plan outlined,” CEA President Jeff Leake and AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel said in a [joint statement released today](#).

The teachers union leaders said that the guidelines appear to shift responsibility for safely reopening school buildings to superintendents and board of education members who already face difficult budgetary choices.

Among the problems teachers see on initial examination of the plan are the following:

- No state funding is identified to assist in COVID-related costs, leaving already financially strapped districts on their own to pay for additional expenses to keep students, teachers, and staff safe.
- Masks are required for all students, teachers, and staff but local districts are required to procure and pay for PPE and other COVID-related expenses.
- Many districts are expected to run buses at or near capacity. There is no requirement for a bus monitor to help enforce protocols.
- There are no COVID-19 testing protocols, or requirements to take temperatures of anyone entering schools.

- The social distancing benchmark of six feet is not required, and is only a guideline if and when it is feasible.

Districts are expected to submit a plan following the [state's reopening template](#) by July 24 but the plans do not have to be approved by the state—one of the many ways in which these guidelines could exacerbate disparities between districts. Only certain aspects of the guidelines are required of districts; other points, labeled guidance, are considered best practices by the State Department of Education (SDE) but are not required, meaning that all schools, especially those without sufficient resources, may fail to implement much of this guidance. Among the measures labeled as guidance include access to handwashing stations for every classroom cohort, designating an isolation room for any student who is suspected of contracting COVID-19, and providing back-up masks to students who board a bus without one.

“The lack of equity in this guideline is astounding,” Leake and Hochadel wrote. “The reality is that some districts have adequate resources for the kind of plan outlined here; those in high-needs communities do not.”

It is a requirement that districts provide families who so choose, for any reason, with the ability to engage in remote learning. The SDE recommends that districts consider how retired teachers and/or teachers who identify as high risk may support students engaged in remote learning.

At a press conference today, Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona said that the SDE wants to give districts the opportunity to accommodate staff with higher risk factors as best they can. “We’re going to try to engage with our teachers and district leaders to try to find possible solutions to this,” he said. “It’s a challenge that we recognize, but we know that to open schools we have to look at a lot of things for which there are no quick answers.”

One of the first steps the SDE is asking districts to take is to send out a survey to families and staff members to determine how many children and educators are likely to return in the fall, as well as whether families plan to transport their children or will rely on school buses.

The plan calls on districts to limit the sharing of materials between students and increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting many surfaces, additional measures that will drive up costs for districts.

While the guidelines call for organizing children into cohorts that don't associate with other children during the school day, there are no measures required or recommended for instituting cohorting on school buses—and before- and after-school programs are merely recommended to follow cohorting recommendations “when feasible.”

Leake and Hochadel conclude, “Clearly what Connecticut’s students, their families, and educators need is a lifeline, not an anchor—unfortunately that is all this so-called ‘plan’ appears to be.”

[Read state guidelines.](#)

[Read statement from CEA and AFT Connecticut.](#)

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