

July 8, 2021

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker, Governor of Illinois  
Office of the Governor  
207 State House  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker,

On behalf of the 848 school districts that are members of the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), we want to extend our appreciation for your leadership while navigating through the challenges of the past 16 months.

As the state emerges from the pandemic, it is important that decision-making regarding COVID-19 mitigation measures for public schools be returned to locally elected boards of education.

We continue to hear from our members across the state regarding how community members are growing increasingly frustrated by the stringent restrictions required of schools. School leaders grow more concerned as each day passes without clear guidance to inform school reopening plans. School boards are subjected to attacks, unwarranted criticism, and defiance from community members who view the stringent mitigation requirements, under which schools have been operating in Phase 5 designation, to be inconsistent and unnecessary. School boards feel stymied by the lack of consistent guidance and the autonomy to make decisions for their school community. The pandemic's impact on the collective psyche of educators, board members, and children cannot be overstated.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently announced that enrollments within K-12 public schools dropped by approximately 3% during the 2020-21 school year when compared to the previous school year. Preschool and kindergarten enrollments dropped by 22% and 9%, respectively. Eighteen states experienced declines of 3% or more. This disturbing trend underscores the urgent need to return children to in-person learning. We can do that by allowing locally elected school officials to determine what mitigation measures should be implemented to keep their district safe and create a productive, healthy learning environment for students.

We respectfully request guidance that:

- Permits local school boards, in consultation with local public health departments and in consideration of local COVID-19 vaccination and transmission data, to make decisions relative to mitigation measures, including the use of face coverings and social distancing practices.

PLEASE REPLY TO:

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- Permits local school boards, in consultation with local public health departments, to make decisions regarding mitigation measures necessary when hosting events during and after school hours.
- Allows for school reopening plans to include an aspirational goal for social distancing of three feet for in-person learning.
- Allows school boards, in consultation with local public health departments, to approve and implement appropriate mitigation measures in response to a rise in positive COVID-19 cases in the local community and/or region.

We know that everyone involved with education is passionate about the steps necessary to return to in- person learning this fall. We also know that various organizations may be taking different approaches to sharing feedback with you. We appreciate your willingness to collaborate and to continue a dialogue on these issues. We stand ready to assist you and to support your efforts to return Illinois students to in-person learning in the fall. Thank you for your consideration and for your steadfast leadership during this trying time.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Bertrand, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



Thomas Neeley  
President, IASB Board of Directors

Cc: Jesse Ruiz, Illinois Deputy Governor for Education