

AFT Resolution

SAFELY REOPENING SCHOOLS

WHEREAS, educators and staff know that the best way for students to connect, learn and thrive is in person, in school; and

WHEREAS, in this unprecedented time as we combat a global health pandemic—the likes of which has not been experienced in 100 years—the well-being and learning of our children are essential, and the safety of staff and students must be paramount; and

WHEREAS, the well-being and learning of our children—in person—as vital as that is, cannot be achieved until we ensure that school buildings, whether used for summer school or in the fall, open only in accordance with the latest scientific knowledge and health guidelines on how to ensure safety; and

WHEREAS, the urgency of harmonizing continuity of instruction, children's well-being and safety is such that the American Federation of Teachers acted from the beginning in April, devoting our expertise, our advocacy and our financial resources toward the goal of reopening public schools safely. The AFT issued “A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities” on April 29, a document based on science and public health protocols as well as on the expertise of educators, staff and healthcare professionals—not on politics or wishful thinking—to provide comprehensive guidance on how to reopen safely and provide for the needs of our students; and

WHEREAS, recently recognizing the imperative to ensure the safety of students and school staff, while acknowledging the vital developmental and social emotional support provided in schools, the AFT; the American Academy of Pediatrics; the National Education Association; and AASA—the School Superintendents Association jointly released a statement on the shared goal of returning children to school this fall; and

WHEREAS, our membership understands the need to get this right; in a poll of our members in late June, 86 percent of educators said they believed the digital learning time this past spring was inadequate for their students. And in the same poll—prior to the surging cases of COVID-19 in many states and the reckless and damaging threats by President Donald Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to open schools fully right now, or else—76 percent of AFT members said they would be comfortable going back to school this fall if

the safety standards outlined in the AFT's reopening framework were in place; and

WHEREAS, educators, like parents, want a science-based plan that prevents schools becoming spreaders of the virus. According to an AP poll, 56 percent of Americans are very or extremely concerned that reopening schools will lead to additional infections in their communities; most say masks and other safety measures are necessary for reopening schools; and less than 8 percent believe that schools can open normally; and

WHEREAS, the White House has recklessly and intentionally misrepresented the guidance of public health authorities—such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease—to move a political agenda that will put children, educators and families in danger; and

WHEREAS, both President Trump and Education Secretary DeVos have disregarded the science on how to reopen schools. The administration's willful denial and lack of national planning have resulted in a health and economic catastrophe, with massive numbers of avoidable infections and deaths, and Depression-level job loss. And the McConnell-led Senate and the Trump administration have failed to negotiate and pass a new stimulus bill to address the resources vitally needed for reopening our schools, abdicating their duty by going on summer recess instead of acting in the best interests of kids and educators; and

WHEREAS, the AFT has calculated that to meet families' needs in America and to ensure that schools and colleges are funded, and that child care needs are met, will require roughly \$400 billion; and

WHEREAS, instead, states face massive budget gaps, with almost 1.4 million jobs in K-12 and higher education already lost or at risk; and

WHEREAS, AFT members and allies around the country have made more than 300,000 phone calls, and sent over 100,000 texts and nearly 60,000 letters to Congress to advocate for these needs:

RESOLVED, that in the fight to ensure the safety and health of American Federation of Teachers' members, our students and our communities, we will use every action and tool available to us from serving on state and local reopening committees to filing grievances, lawsuits and other

actions against unsafe and unsound plans or the faulty implementation of plans. Nothing is off the table when it comes to the safety and health of those we represent and those we serve, including supporting local and/or state affiliate safety strikes on a case-by-case basis as a last resort; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT declares that school buildings can be open in places only where:

- 1. The average daily community infection rate among those tested for COVID-19 is below 5 percent and the transmission rate is below 1 percent.**
- 2. There is effective disease surveillance, tracing and isolation in the region.**
- 3. Staff who are at high risk for serious health problems or death if they contract COVID-19 have access to special accommodations or workplace adjustments.**
- 4. There is a statewide, city- and/or community-level authority empowered to trigger closure in the event of a spike in infection or when public health standards aren't being met.**
- 5. The district and school have developed and funded proper safeguards and practices to protect health and safety, including:**
 - Physical distancing of 6 feet;**
 - Face coverings to be worn by students and staff;**
 - Access to well-stocked hand-washing facilities;**
 - Resources and staffing to adequately clean and sanitize facilities and buses; and**
 - Necessary updates to ventilation and building systems.**
- 6. AFT members and leaders as well as families and community partners are at the table together envisioning and implementing plans to reopen our schools; and**

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to bring all necessary resources to bear, including providing information and tools, supporting affiliates in legal matters, and working with and educating other stakeholders, in advocacy for safe reopening plans—from the bargaining table to legislatures and the courtroom—with the goal of securing safe conditions for all students and school staff; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to fight for the funding needed for safe and effective reopening in K-12 and higher education, and providing child care for those who need it, including pressing Mitch McConnell and his Republican colleagues to do their jobs; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to fight for resources to support students' well-being and to improve teaching and learning, including providing access to high-speed internet and devices, as well as making remote instruction, where required, robust and informed by a clearinghouse of effective practices; providing instructional supports and tutoring; high-quality professional development; guidance counselors and nurses; and meals for students.

(2020)