

2021 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY PRIORITY

Reopening of Schools

North Carolina PTA understands that the reopening of our state's preK-12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic is vital to ensure the continuity of education. However, it should not outweigh the safety and the mental and physical health of our students, educators, school employees, and families.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Plans for reopening shall incorporate the best available science and infectious disease doctors and health practitioners' expertise. Plans should also strictly follow the most up-to-date Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, including but not limited to reasonable social distancing, rigorous sanitizing processes, and viral screening and testing protocols.
- North Carolina PTA believes that our state's school districts must plan and align logistics, educational strategies, and public health approaches into one coherent response. We recognize that there will not be a one-size-fits-all process for the reopening of schools.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement is essential for effective decision-making and implementation.

- Any decision to reopen schools must involve parents, families, students, educators, school employees, public health experts, and community members in planning, implementing, and monitoring the 2021-2022 school year.

The presence of the parent and student voice and attention to unique family situations is critical to the successful reopening of schools.

- Effective stakeholder engagement must be inclusive, transparent, provide multiple opportunities for input, and include meaningful, clear, and concise communication. All information and protocols should be disseminated to parents, families, students, and communities, using current best practices for family and student engagement. Furthermore, all communications must be accessible to parents with disabilities and available in other languages.
- North Carolina Schools must be prepared to address the transition back to school, the trauma of a pandemic, and the many instructional issues, including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide.

North Carolina students will likely return to schools with serious gaps in their learning and retention and unique social-emotional needs.

- North Carolina Schools must be prepared to identify indicators, such as symptoms of trauma, learning loss, and/or retention, and have the requisite funding and community partnerships to effectively support the student and their family as reopening occurs.
- North Carolina school districts must ensure multiple modes of instruction and scheduling plans are developed in order to remediate and support students wherever they are on the continuum. Close adherence to local and state academic standards is imperative as we begin the long, arduous, and as yet unknown process of reopening our state's preK-12 schools.

North Carolina PTA strongly supports a robust federal and state investment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes investments in public health, public schools, universities, hospitals, and local and state governments.

- North Carolina PTA urges the federal and state governments to provide the funding necessary to ensure that when our schools reopen, they have the resources needed to do so as safely and successfully as possible. Many of our state's school districts are already working without the resources necessary to provide an equitable education and critical supports to all students.
- The added strain of recovery from a worldwide pandemic will wreak havoc on all localities and require significant, immediate, and continuing support from federal and state funding. While our public schools have been woefully under-resourced, this next phase of "returning to school" is an opportunity to visualize what public education looks like in a post-pandemic era, to ensure every child can reach their fullest potential regardless of zip code.