



# RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS <sup>AFT</sup><sub>AFL - CIO</sub>

January 12, 2022

The Honorable Governor Daniel McKee  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor McKee,

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals understands and strongly supports the need for students to be in the classroom every day. In fact, attendance is the single biggest factor in student achievement. For the better part of the past two years our members, like all other Rhode Islanders, have had every aspect of their lives disrupted by the consequences of Covid-19.

The entire Rhode Island school community has shown remarkable resilience under extraordinary circumstances. Teachers, administrators, and staff have developed and implemented numerous strategies to provide appropriate educational opportunities throughout this ever-evolving crisis.

Our state has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country. Over ninety percent of our teachers and school staff have been vaccinated. In spite of this we have seen a dramatic surge in new cases since the beginning of the New Year.

As I stated earlier the RIFTHP believes that students need to be in school whenever possible. We also recognize that there may be situations where in-person schooling may not be the safest or educationally appropriate setting of our students, teachers, or staff. Reports of collapsing classes, combining multiple classes into auditoriums or cafeterias, or even staffing classes with non-certified “teachers” for multiple days is not an appropriate educational model. As we saw at the beginning of the pandemic there may be situations where virtual learning is a viable option.

At a recent meeting of the RIFTHP PreK-12 local presidents, who are all classroom teachers, the following list of terms and conditions for safe, healthy, and educationally sound in-person education were developed for your consideration.

- 1.) The decision to close a classroom, school, or district should be at the sole discretion of the local school superintendent. The local school administration with data and input from their leadership team, staff and parents have the clearest understanding of their individual schools and districts.
- 2.) The necessity to close a school or district should be made according to a set of clear metrics. Those metrics should consider factors such as the percentage of students absent, the number of

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teachers absent, the number of teachers necessary to cover every class, and the percentage of students and teachers who are Covid positive.

- 3.) In situations where closures are expected last more than two days districts will develop contingency plans for school breakfast and lunch to be provided. Also, school-based community vaccination clinics should be regularly scheduled for parents and students in districts with low vaccination rates.
- 4.) The State should provide resources for each school to have the staff and materials necessary to test all students and staff at a minimum of once per week.
- 5.) The State should provide an adequate amount of N95 or KN95 masks for all students and staff. The current mask mandate executive order should be extended until there is a dramatic decline in cases.
- 6.) School districts should re-emphasize the proper protocols with respect to cleaning and sanitation of buildings.
- 7.) Whenever possible social distancing and stable pods should be utilized.
- 8.) Due to the high volume of teachers who have been forced to quarantine due to contracting Covid or being determined to be a close contact the Governor should reauthorize the executive order which exempts those days from be charged to someone's personal sick leave.

In order to ensure the health and safety of all students and staff as well as provide the most appropriate educational opportunities for all students we urge you to consider mandating these recommendations through executive order. Thank you for your consideration I look forward to continuing working with you as we strive to return to normalcy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Francis J. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Francis J. Flynn