



**Kentucky Education Association**  
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Kentucky Education Association statement on school reopening:

The Kentucky Education Association (KEA) is a voluntary membership organization comprised of 42,000 educators in various phases of their careers, including Kentuckians aspiring to become educators, those who are actively working as educators, and those who have retired from education. This letter is about all KEA members, but our concern isn't limited just to them. We are also expressing our concern about every potential, current and retired educator in Kentucky.

Public school educators are everywhere in our communities. Educators aren't just teachers; they are also bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, school secretaries, instructional aides, and administrators. They are young and old, single and married, working and retired. If you are reading this letter, odds are high that you are connected to at least one educator in some way. A Kentucky educator might be your relative, your neighbor, a current or former colleague. They might be your own current or former teacher, school secretary, bus driver or friend. Educators aren't remote figures with whom you have no connection: they are an integral part of every community in every county in the state.

Like all of you, educators' lives have been turned upside down by the coronavirus; that is particularly true for educators who are currently employed. When the first cases of COVID19 hit Kentucky in March, one of the first steps we took to flatten the rate of infection was to close public schools. That made perfect sense because schools are places where large numbers of people regularly gather in close proximity for extended periods of time. In other words, locations that create the perfect circumstances for this extremely deadly virus to spread.

Due to the swift and decisive recommendations by Governor Beshear and with the support of local school districts, throughout March, April, and May, Kentucky was among the states doing the best job of controlling the virus. As a result, we started slowly resuming some limited activity on Memorial Day weekend. Two weeks later, cases in Kentucky started to rise. Renewed warnings were issued and the populace was reminded to behave responsibly. But the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and summer travel to virus hotspots have put all of us at risk again. Kentucky is now a state that other U.S. citizens are being warned away from. As recently as August 5<sup>th</sup>, when asked about the safety of bringing students back to school in person, Governor Beshear said, "If in-person classes were to start today and I had to make a recommendation, I would recommend to push it back."

KEA believes that public schools serve many roles, not the least of which is to provide a place where all students can learn and all educators can work in a safe environment. We teach children to think critically; to consider facts and science; and to make rational decisions based on what they know to be true. We all wish we knew when life will be able to return to normal, but we don't. What we do know from the facts we can observe since Memorial Day is that acting as though life was back to normal absolutely doesn't make it so.

**By every objective measure, and without public schools being open at all during the last few months, the coronavirus situation in Kentucky at this moment is far worse than it was in March.** If we all believed it wasn't safe to operate schools then, how can it possibly be safe to reopen now?

The most difficult decisions to make are those where all the choices are bad. Under those circumstances, the best decision is the one that does the least harm. In this moment, we must all weigh our craving for normalcy against the health and safety of our children, the educators who actively serve them, the retired educators and other senior Kentuckians who are at higher risk from this disease, and all their families and communities.

**KEA believes the choice, based on scientific evidence, is clear: Kentucky's public schools should not open to in-person instruction at this time.** Every educator that can perform his or her duties from home should be encouraged to do so. For those whose job duties require their presence in school facilities, great care should be taken to ensure strict compliance with mask, social distancing, and disinfecting protocols. In short, only the most essential operations should occur in person, for the least period of time possible and with the fewest number of people.

In-person instruction should not resume until, at a minimum, the [infection rate in Kentucky statewide](#) and the infection rate in the county in which the school district is located both fall below 4% and both remain below 4% for 21 consecutive days as measured by a 7-day rolling average. Districts must also consider other factors unique to their own communities, such as the infection rate among school-aged children and whether the Department of Public Health supports their reopening plan. Doing anything else is simply irresponsible. Even when those benchmarks are met, school districts that plan to reopen to in-person instruction must implement appropriate, comprehensive mitigation procedures, must continue to offer virtual instruction to families that request it, must accommodate staff members who are at high risk or who live with a person at high risk, and must be ready to return entirely to virtual instruction if the state or county metrics require it. Unfortunately, this will be the reality of public education and of our economy until there is an effective vaccine or reliable treatment for COVID19, or both. And no one can predict just when that might be.

**KEA calls on school district decision makers, specifically superintendents and school boards, to make the responsible decision to protect students and educators by closing schools to in-person instruction and beginning the 2020-21 school year virtually for all students.** We applaud and fully support the many school districts that have already made the right decision and hope that others will follow those examples of leadership during challenging times. But there is no more time to waste: making this decision now allows educators to plan and develop meaningful online instruction and gives parents the time they need to prepare.

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