

# Cincinnati Federation of Teachers

## Cincinnati Federation of Office Professionals



Local 1520 | AFT | OFT | AFL-CIO

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April 24, 2020

### **CPS Must Plan Now for a Safe 2020-21 School Year**

Cincinnati's teachers were left heartbroken when Governor DeWine decided last week that school buildings would stay closed for the rest of this school year.

Since the sudden Mid-March closure order, teachers have worked with their principals and team members to provide distance learning. It's been challenging for students, their parents, and teachers accustomed to the critical face to face interactions that come only in a classroom. But teachers had hoped there would be at least some opportunity to reconnect with their students face-to-face before graduation or promotion to the next grade.

Sadly, the decision to keep school building shuttered through May was necessary. Too many Ohioans are sick and dying to take the risk.

Now we must focus on how we can re-open schools in August in a way that is safe and sustainable for students, teachers and staff.

That will not be easy.

Despite the happy talk at those nightly White House briefings, it seems clear from public health experts that COVID-19 will not "miraculously disappear" any time soon. If anything, it will present an ongoing challenge until a widely available vaccine or reliable treatment emerges. That could be a year or more from now. Until then, social distancing and other efforts to protect us from a highly infectious and potentially deadly disease must continue.

Our district's enrollment growth over the last decade shows the confidence Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) has earned from Cincinnati's families. Parents count on us to provide a safe environment where their children can learn and grow. Whether we can retain that confidence in the face of an international pandemic will test all of us.

Cincinnati Federation of Teachers (CFT) has established a COVID-19 Task Force to prepare recommendations for our members and the District to assure we do whatever we can to keep our students, their families, and all of our staff healthy during the upcoming school year. We will look for

guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Ohio Department of Education and our national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers. The challenges we face will include the following:

- How to socially distance in crowded school buildings. Example: Walnut Hills High School enrolls 3200 students. Hallways at Walnut and some other CPS high schools are packed during class changes. We may need to look at staggered schedules and/or moving teachers rather than students during class changes.
- School cafeterias typically involve large groups of students, communal tables and cafeteria style food lines. How can we change those traditions to assure social distancing and necessary sanitation?
- In many school buildings there are limited numbers of restrooms. More access for frequent hand washing and / or sanitizing must be made available.
- Should we require students and staff to wear masks or other protective gear? If so, we need to provide sufficient supplies. We cannot count on all families to equip their children on their own.
- Teachers and other school staff should not come to work when sick to avoid spreading disease. But we have limited sick days, and some are tempted to come to work when sick. Some staff members have the sorts of preexisting conditions like hypertension or diabetes that makes them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. How do we assure they are protected as we move forward?
- Public health professionals insist that it will not be safe to reopen workplaces without widespread testing. How can CPS make sure ample testing and screening is available when schools reopen?
- CDC guidelines call for temporary school closings and deep cleaning when a student or staff member tests positive. How do we make sure we are better prepared for that, or in the worst-case scenario, another lengthy school shut down because of a re-emergence of the epidemic in the Fall or Winter?

We have much work to do to make sure our schools are ready to open safely for the coming school year.

Staying Safe Together,

Julie Sellers, President

Cincinnati Federation of Teachers