

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Grand Rapids, MI. (July 22, 2020)-The Kent County Education Association (KCEA), a Coordinating Council of the Michigan Education Association (MEA), represents over 4,100 members from 20 school districts including teachers, social workers, speech and other medical therapists, guidance counselors, school psychologists, secretaries, custodians, maintenance workers, paraprofessionals, food service workers, bus drivers, and other school employees.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has created the greatest challenge of our generation. Many families find themselves facing the closure of schools, loss of jobs, sickness, and uncertainty. Our school leaders and employees continuously adapt to these changing conditions. We are proud of the work and efforts of public school employees in meeting the incredible challenges of 2020.

We now face the daunting task of resuming school while the virus still rages across the United States. Teachers and support staff build caring relationships with students, and those relationships are crucial to learning. Each and every public school staff member believes the best place for our students to learn is in the classroom in the care of highly trained professional public educators and support staff in a safe environment. In the event that in-person learning is not an option, we are committed to providing a quality and supportive educational experience for all students.

As Local Leaders of the Kent County Education and Support Staff Associations, we believe that:

1. Our number one priority is the health and safety of our students, families, and staff.
2. Schools are most effective when staff, administration, elected officials, and families work together.
3. All public school employees are essential and must be included in the decision-making process for all phases of a safe return to school, including in-person, remote, and hybrid models.
4. Public schools adapt to meet the needs of all students. Meaningful learning can take place in many forms when training and support are provided.
5. Decisions regarding learning and working conditions must be based on scientific data and recommendations. Schools should only resume in-person classes if it is safe.
6. We expect Phase 4 "Strongly Recommended" procedures in Michigan's Return to School Roadmap to be implemented to the greatest degree possible. We expect districts to communicate with parents, students, and staff when it is not possible to follow these procedures.
7. Facial coverings reduce the spread of COVID-19 transmission and must be used throughout the school day by all students and staff unless medical documentation is provided.
8. Changes in working conditions, safety protocols, and online instruction must be bargained with local associations.
9. Public school students should be taught by public school educators in their districts, whether online or in person.

10. All Kent County educators are committed to their students and families. We have never given up, nor will we in the future.

The KCEA calls on all leaders, national, state, and local, to work together to support public education by promoting, supporting, and advocating for strict health and safety procedures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

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