

MEA's Five Standards That Must Be Met for a Safe Return to School



On behalf of the approximately 120,000 public school and higher education employees we represent, the Michigan Education Association (MEA) demands elected officials and districts make the safety of students and staff the paramount concern when looking at a return to school this fall. Health and safety policies must rely on sound science and guidance from medical professionals – not political or financial expediency.

Therefore, MEA insists that every school district, college and university meet the following minimum standards, particularly in order to return to any in-person learning:

1. Education employees' voices and the local leaders of the association they are represented by must be at the center of all local discussions about re-opening of schools and campuses, including health and safety protocols. Their expertise is essential in ensuring day-to-day operations are structured to protect students, staff, and their families. All return to school and campus plans – whether they are virtual, in-person, or a hybrid of the two – must be bargained in good faith as required by state law with all represented employee groups.
2. The “strongly recommended” practices and procedures outlined for Phase 4 in the MI Safe Schools Roadmap must be in place to safely re-open for in-person instruction. Safety protocols must include: social distancing in all classrooms, shared spaces, and buses; masks worn by all students and employees unless otherwise medically advised; and consistent and thorough health screenings for all students and staff.
3. School districts, colleges and universities must provide needed personal protective equipment to all students and educators, not rely on individuals to purchase these essentials. Adequate supplies and staffing for frequent disinfecting of facilities must also be provided.
4. Equitable access to education and needed resources are imperative for all students – no matter where students are from, what means of instruction is being used, and any student's special learning needs. Educators must be empowered and provided support to ensure quality student learning opportunities regardless of in-person or distance delivery. Students and staff must be provided with the technology access and learning tools to be successful. Student needs – ranging from special education services to availability of food to mental health supports – must be appropriately met.
5. It is imperative that students are educated and supported by the dedicated staff they know and trust and who care about them, especially in these challenging times. The work of teachers and other school and higher education employees will not be outsourced.

MEA stands with its 1,132 local associations across the state of Michigan in their efforts to demand and provide a safe and equitable return to school for members and students. Educators want nothing more than to safely return to in-person instruction, which we know is irreplaceable to students. But these standards must be consistently enforced to keep everyone safe – and the federal and state government must provide the funding necessary to meet these additional safety needs, as well as prevent education budget cuts due to pandemic-driven revenue losses.