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AFT News Release

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AFT Launches Landmark Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities

Union issues blueprint for imagining a new normal for public education, public health and our economy in the age of COVID-19

WASHINGTON—The American Federation of Teachers has released a detailed road map that, in the absence of a COVID-19 vaccine, charts a path to safely and responsibly reopen school buildings and other institutions crucial to the well-being and economic vitality of our communities.

The 20-page, science-based “[Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities](#)” sprung from an intense collaboration of public health professionals, union leaders and frontline workers to prepare for what happens next in the period between flattening the curve and truly eradicating the virus.

It features five core pillars that inform our decision to reopen the country based on the science as well as educator and healthcare expertise—not on politics or wishful thinking.

To gradually reopen, we need to:

1. Maintain physical distancing until the number of new cases declines for at least 14 consecutive days. Reducing the number of new cases is a prerequisite for transitioning to reopening plans on a community-by-community basis.
2. Put in place the infrastructure and resources to test, trace and isolate new cases. Transitioning from community-focused physical distancing and stay-in-place orders to case-specific interventions requires ramping up the capacity to test, trace and isolate each new case.
3. Deploy the public health tools that prevent the virus' spread and align them with education strategies that meet the needs of students.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.7 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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4. Involve workers, unions, parents and communities in all planning. Each workplace and community faces unique challenges related to COVID-19. To ensure that reopening plans address those challenges, broad worker and community involvement is necessary. They must be engaged, educated and empowered.

5. Invest in recovery: Do not abandon America's communities or forfeit America's future. These interventions will require more—not less—investment in public health and in our schools, universities, hospitals, and local and state governments. Strengthening communities should be a priority in the recovery.

The blueprint acknowledges Americans' eagerness to return to some semblance of "normal." But to do so, we must meet an unprecedented challenge: figuring out how to reimagine our society and the physical places we hold dear—public schools, places of worship, workplaces, restaurants and more—in ways that put our ultimate priorities first: the safety and well-being of working families, especially frontline workers, and the economic health of society.

Our schools, in addition to educating students and acting as centers of the community, enable parents to work outside the home, meaning their safe reopening is a pivotal—if not the most pivotal—factor in remaking the country.

The comprehensive document addresses complexities and provides specific guidance for transitioning from lockdowns to other public health approaches. And it is the only plan we know of that marries the instructional and social-emotional needs of students and the logistics of programming in schools with the imperative to adopt public health tools that prevent viral transmission.

It shows how, in response to the crisis, we must plan and align logistics, educational strategies and public health approaches into one coherent response. And it is expected to evolve as the data, and the facts, change.

AFT President Randi Weingarten said: "America is staring down a singular challenge that will require all of us to come together and negotiate a safe path forward. By drawing on facts and science, and the expertise of educators and healthcare practitioners, we have drafted a bold five-point plan that aligns necessary public health tools, student instructional needs and logistics to gradually—but safely, equitably and intentionally—reopen our schools and communities.

"Our blueprint serves as a stark contrast to the conflicting guidance, bluster and lies of the Trump administration. The input of educators and healthcare workers, as well as parents, is crucial in making any reopening plan work. They are the eyes and ears, and are indispensable in making any plan work safely and effectively. We hope this blueprint will be the start of a real discussion on

reopening schools, universities and other workplaces that allows our workers and families not only to dream of a safe and welcoming future, but to realize it.”

The plan [can be read here](#).

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