

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1007

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Thank you for prioritizing the production and delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine on the first day of your administration, as well as strengthening testing, contact tracing, and on-going public health efforts to control the spread of the disease. Additionally, I appreciate your emphasis on the education system and your focus on fully reopening schools. In order to operate schools safely, we need a strong, comprehensive, and coordinated plan.

As a part of this effort, I urge your administration to prioritize the vaccination of teachers and school support staff, as well as the development of clear guidelines for testing and contact tracing at schools. We also need clear federal guidelines strongly encouraging the use of masks on school property, safe building design, and safe practices in the school building and classroom.

One of the major challenges of COVID-19 in Georgia's 7th Congressional District (Gwinnett and Forsyth Counties) has been navigating the challenge of protecting teachers, school support staff, and their families while ensuring our children can safely return for in-person instruction. In the 7th district, the safety standards as well as their enforcement varies significantly by school district — and even from school to school within a district. As a result, we have heard from many teachers and support staff who are afraid because they have been asked to put their health and lives on the line, and risk the health and lives of their families, to keep their jobs.

Additionally, even as the state of Georgia has encouraged schools to remain open for in person instruction, they have enacted a vaccine administration plan that, contrary to the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, fails to prioritize vaccination of teachers, school staff and other essential workers.

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The struggle to ensure proper safety standards for in person learning appears to have come at serious cost: several Georgia teachers have died of COVID-19 in a neighboring school district, and a paraprofessional recently died in Gwinnett County. Some educators and support staff who are at risk, or who have family members at risk, have quit their jobs. The truth is that despite some efforts at reporting COVID-19 cases and risk at our schools, we really do not know the full impact of reopening our schools because of the lack of testing capacity and resources for contact tracing in our community.

We are encouraged by your “American Rescue Plan” and your recent Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers to address school openings; however, we need to close the gap in current response efforts and make sure that the health and safety of teachers and support staff, as well as their families, are prioritized when they return to the classroom — including vaccination. Such action will have an enormous stabilizing effect on our communities and reassure teachers and others working in our schools that their lives are a priority, even as we ask them to go back to the classroom in person. I appreciate your commitment to taking immediate action to confront this crisis head-on, and I stand ready to work together and get the job done.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Bourdeaux
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC: The Honorable Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Honorable Phil Rosenfelt, Acting Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education

The Honorable Norris Cochran, Acting Secretary of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services