

## Education Minnesota

# Education Minnesota supports new path to reopening school buildings, if safety rules are enforced and virus continues to withdraw

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*ST. PAUL, Minnesota. Dec. 16, 2020* – The plan to reopen school buildings to the youngest learners is workable, but only with strict enforcement of safety protocols and a renewed commitment by all Minnesotans to slowing the spread of the virus in their communities, said Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota.

Gov. Tim Walz presented a plan Wednesday that would change the state’s criteria for when schools can resume in-person instruction for preschool- and elementary-aged children, but only if schools accepted strict requirements for safety equipment and policies, which will be enforced by the Minnesota Department of Labor. A small number of districts are expected to reopen buildings Jan. 18 with more districts reopening their elementary schools in the following weeks.

“For months now, educators have said they wanted to get back into their classrooms with their students, but only when it’s safe for everyone to do so,” Specht said. “If districts meet the new high bar for safety for students and staff, and there are swift, serious consequences for the few employers who might cut corners, this plan could get more buildings open for the littlest learners.”

Specht said parents should not expect all elementary schools to open next month because the process for making buildings safe will take time. Also, she noted schools can’t reopen if they have too many staff members who are sick or in quarantine, which common sense says is related to the amount of community spread of the virus.

“We’ve learned that schools aren’t islands and educators aren’t magically immune to what’s happening in their neighborhoods,” Specht said. “This virus spreads everywhere. We’re all in this together. What might look like individual decisions about masks, social contact and family gatherings over the holidays actually affect us all. Please, wear your mask, keep your distance and stay home when you can. If you won’t do it for yourself, do it for your local students and their educators.”

Specht noted the pain of the pandemic has not been shared equally. Communities of color in Minnesota represent a disproportionate share of the people infected, hospitalized and killed by the disease. Appropriately, the plan presented Wednesday gives districts and families some freedom to choose a learning model that works for them.

“There will be some districts and some families who weigh the risks of returning to in-person learning and decide they’re not comfortable until many more people have access to the COVID-19 vaccine,” Specht said. “That’s a reasonable choice and should be supported. Our union stands ready to support the decisions educators and parents make that’s best for them.”

### **About Education Minnesota**

Education Minnesota is the voice for professional educators and students. Education Minnesota’s members include teachers and education support professionals in Minnesota’s public school districts, faculty members at Minnesota’s community and technical colleges and University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth and Crookston, retired educators and student teachers. Education Minnesota is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association and AFL-CIO.

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