

Education Minnesota

Reopening schools requires a plan that is safe, effective and sustainable

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ST. PAUL, Minnesota. July 9, 2020 – The majority of Minnesotans who responded to a state survey favored reopening schools this fall, but Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said Thursday the state must continue working toward a plan that is safe, effective and sustainable.

“There is currently no plan for opening schools that doesn’t come with trade-offs between safety, educational effectiveness and sustainability,” Specht said. “Continued distance learning is the safest option, but it doesn’t meet the educational needs of all students. The most educationally effective plan is in-person learning, but it requires big, unfunded changes in how schools operate and still comes with risk. The hybrid plans are even more expensive and aren’t sustainable if educators are asked to double their workload with both distance and in-person learning.”

“We need to come together - parents, educators, scientists and policy makers - to find the right solutions for the students of Minnesota,” she said. “There will be some give-and-take, but there must also be a common understanding that the educator’s job is to educate and the health of students and educators should not be sacrificed to an economy rigged to benefit the richest 1 percent and the largest corporations. Working people are in this pandemic together, and only together can we make a Minnesota that works for all of us, no exceptions.”

The Minnesota Department of Education released on Thursday the results of an informal survey of more than 130,000 parents in Minnesota. Because of how the data was collected, the survey does not represent a scientific representation of all parents. Nearly two-thirds of parents who took the survey said they would feel comfortable sending students back to school this fall. Just over 11 percent of respondents said they would not feel comfortable sending their students back to school.

Specht also responded to President Donald Trump’s call to ignore the disease-prevention guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and physically reopen schools to all students in the fall with few, if any, protections against the spread of COVID-19. Trump also tweeted a threat to cut off federal funding for schools that do not physically reopen.

“Most parents and educators want the students of Minnesota to receive an education that lets each one of them pursue their dreams, no matter where they live or what they look like. Now a few politicians in Washington and the wealthy interests who support them are trying to rush the reopening of schools before there’s a plan to do it safely and effectively for students and educators. We need to come together – parents, educators, scientists, community leaders and policy makers – and find a solution and the resources to ensure all of us can care for our families, protect our health, and have

our voices heard, not just on the first day in the fall but for the whole school year.”

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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