



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Keep Schools Face-to-Face; Empower Districts to Be Safe

COLUMBIA — Today The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA) held a press conference at the South Carolina Statehouse with fellow education advocates, as well as pediatric and public health experts across the state to [issue a joint statement](#).

The SCEA believes that students learn best when they are in-person with face-to-face instruction. For in-person learning to be possible, student health and safety must be prioritized in all decisions to slow the rapid spread of COVID-19 among children.

“Are we doing what's best for children?” The SCEA President Sherry East asked. “Decisions need to be made that put children first, which means listening to the experts.”

South Carolina pediatricians have been consistent and clear on preventing COVID-19 infection: Vaccinate when eligible, and wear masks in schools to slow the spread.

Children have suffered enough throughout this pandemic. We are now in the third consecutive school year impacted by COVID-19. Now the number of seriously ill and dying children is climbing. In addition, the number of students in quarantine due to exposure has reached over 86,000 and is growing daily.

DHEC guidelines around quarantine are clear and unambiguous. With masking, quarantines for exposure reduce significantly. By not allowing districts to require masking, legislators are responsible for these interruptions.

“Our children should never be used as political pawns,” East said. “It is nauseating to think that children are collateral in a political game. It's time for this game to end”

In this public health crisis, our school districts should be empowered to utilize the full range of mitigation strategies recommended by DHEC and local health professionals. This is especially important right now since children ages 5-11 are not eligible for the vaccine that numerous state leaders have identified as the key to moving our state out of the pandemic.

The need for legislative action and leadership is urgent and immediate. Therefore, The SCEA urges legislators to put students first, keep schools face-to-face and empower districts to keep children safe.

Speaker of the House Jay Lucas and President of the Senate Harvey Peeler to immediately call the legislature back to work to return operational decision-making authority to local school districts.

The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA) represents members employed in public schools throughout South Carolina and is an affiliate of the largest professional association of educators in the country. As the leading advocate for the schools South Carolina students deserve, The SCEA works to promote quality public education and to support public school employees.