



EMBARGOED UNTIL 2:00 PM ET FRIDAY, JULY 17

Joe Biden's Roadmap to Reopening Schools Safely

Educators, students, and families have done an incredible job in difficult circumstances over the last four months. Everyone wants schools to fully reopen for in-person instruction. Creating the conditions to make it happen should be a top national priority. Joe Biden believes that the decision about when to reopen safely should be made by state, tribal, and local officials, based on science and in consultation with communities and tribal governments. It should be made with the safety of students and educators in mind. And, it should be made recognizing that if we do this wrong, we will put lives at risk and set our economy and our country back.

The challenge facing our schools is unprecedented. President Trump has made it much worse. We had a window to get this right. And, Trump blew it. His administration failed to heed the experts and take the steps required to reduce infections in our communities. As a result, cases have exploded. Now our window before the new school year is closing rapidly, and we are forced to grapple with reopening our schools in an environment of much greater risk to educators, students, and their families than there would have been if America had competent leadership.

Over a month ago, Biden identified [key steps](#) that Donald Trump needed to take to reopen our schools safely. Trump has taken none of them. In fact, he's done the opposite. He has threatened to force schools to reopen for in-person instruction without the basic resources they need to keep students, educators, and communities safe. If Trump had actually done his job as President, the decisions facing our schools would look fundamentally different.

Joe Biden has a simple five-step roadmap to support local decision-making on reopening schools safely and to help students whose learning was interrupted:

Get the Virus Under Control: Months into this crisis, infection rates are spiking across the country, personal protective equipment (PPE) is still in short supply, and hospitalizations and deaths are unacceptably high. We have only weeks to go before the school year begins, and we have no plan, no leadership, and no additional resources to fight this crisis. We do not have sufficient testing, adequate contact tracing, or reliable supply chains. It is outrageous that Trump forced educators, parents, and caregivers into this situation. If we want to reopen schools safely, we need to get cases down in states and communities across America. Now. That means mask wearing and appropriate social distancing guidelines that match the virus trajectory in a community. In addition,

Biden has laid out comprehensive plans on [March 12](#), [April 27](#), and [June 11](#), among others, to:

- Implement nationwide testing-and-tracing, including doubling the number of drive-through testing sites;
- Establish a sustainable supply chain for PPE, including fully utilizing the Defense Production Act to ensure enough masks for every school in America every day;
- Protect older Americans and others at high risk;
- Provide small businesses with the resources they need to reopen safely.

Set National Safety Guidelines, Empower Local Decision-Making: The Trump Administration's chaotic and politicized response has left school districts to improvise a thousand hard decisions on their own. Schools need clear, consistent, effective national guidelines, not mixed messages and political ultimatums. Biden would task the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and other federal agencies with establishing basic, objective criteria to guide state, tribal, and local officials in deciding if and how reopening can be managed safely in their communities, including:

- Decisions on reopening have been tied to the level of risk and degree of viral spread in the community. Biden [agrees](#) with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and AASA, the School Superintendents Association, that "schools in areas with high levels of COVID-19 community spread should not be compelled to reopen against the judgement of local experts."
- Emergency funding needs have been met so that schools have the resources to reconfigure classrooms, kitchens, and other spaces, improve ventilation, and take other necessary steps to make it easier to physically distance and minimize risk of spread.
- Schools have taken necessary precautions to foster a culture of health and safety and protect educators and students, including reducing class size, limiting large gatherings, and providing safe environments for eating.
- Schools have ready access to enough masks and other PPE for every student and educator every day, if they need it.
- Reasonable accommodations have been made for at-risk educators and students, in collaboration with educators, their unions, parents, and caregivers.
- State and local officials have shared a plan for regularly communicating about school decisions and resources with parents, caregivers, educators, and the community.
- The federal government has issued reopening guidelines, free from political interference, in greater detail to answer basic questions that schools have, including: How low does the community infection rate need to be to reopen and at what point should schools shut down again if cases rise? What are safe maximum class sizes? If schools cannot accommodate everyone, who should return to the classroom first? The current lack of clarity is paralyzing for schools.

Provide Emergency Funding for Public Schools and Child Care Providers: Schools urgently need emergency financial support, but what they have gotten from Trump is bluster and bullying and, worse, threats to further slash their funding. As a result of Trump's failure to lead, states could face drastic budget shortfalls totalling [\\$555 billion](#) over state fiscal years of 2020-2022. Left unaddressed, these shortfalls could result in significant layoffs. According to one analysis, just a conservative [5% decrease](#) in state education funding would result in the loss of almost 28,000 school positions, including teachers, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists.

As President, Biden will always put our children, educators, and families first. He believes public schools, especially Title I schools - should have all the resources they need to safely return to in-person instruction and support all students. Biden is:

- *Calling on Trump and Senate Republicans to pass the education funding in the HEROES Act*, which the House passed months ago. This bill includes roughly \$58 billion for local school districts to stabilize public education and save jobs. Over four months ago, Biden [called](#) for a renewable fund for state, tribal, and local governments to help prevent budget shortfalls and protect that relief from exactly the kind of political brinkmanship we are seeing from Trump and Republicans leaders today. It is past time to get it done.
- *Calling on the Congress to pass a separate emergency package* to ensure schools have the additional resources they need to adapt effectively to COVID-19. School officials estimate that districts will need about [\\$30 billion](#) to put in place the changes needed to reopen safely. This package should include funding for child care providers and public schools — particularly Title I schools and Indian schools — for personal protective equipment; public health and sanitation products; custodial and health services; and alterations to building ventilation systems, classrooms, schedules, class size, and transportation. And, an additional roughly [\\$4 billion](#) is needed to upgrade technology and broadband. [Biden has previously announced](#) that, as President, he will ensure schools have the resources to double the number of psychologists, counselors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals in schools so our kids get the mental health care they need. That's more important now than ever before, as kids grapple with the stress and trauma of our economic and public health crisis.

Ensuring High-Quality Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: We are continuing to learn how to best support students, educators, and their families through this challenging time. Biden would mobilize a large-scale U.S. Department of Education effort to work with practitioners to develop, adopt, and share the latest tools and best practices to ensure high-quality learning during this pandemic. This effort would include:

- *Delivering high-quality remote and hybrid learning* with a special emphasis on students with disabilities, English-language learners, and students who do not have access to specific technology, such as broadband and devices. This

includes dedicated time and resources for our educators to pursue professional development opportunities tailored to the unique circumstances of this crisis.

- *Creating a Safer Schools Best Practices Clearinghouse* to help schools and child care providers across the country and around the world share approaches, protocols, and tools for reopening safely.
- *Providing tools and resources for parents and other caregivers* to help them make informed decisions on sending their children to school, help their children cope with the stress of this pandemic, and assist them with their children's remote learning.
- *Ensuring tailored remote teaching assignments and educational plans* for educators and students who are at greater risk to COVID-19 or live with a family member who is.
- *Working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health to share with educators and families evolving scientific insights into how COVID-19 affects children.* [Biden has called for](#) scaling up COVID-19 pediatric research partnerships to address glaring gaps in our knowledge.

Closing the COVID-19 Educational Equity Gap: Despite the best efforts of educators, students, and families, this crisis, coupled with long-standing racial inequities, has led many students, especially low-income students and students of color, to struggle and fall behind. New research shows that some students could even lose an entire year of academic gains. As President, Biden would:

- *Direct a White House-led initiative to identify evidence-based policy solutions* that address gaps in learning, mental health, social and emotional well-being, and systemic racial and socioeconomic disparities in education that the pandemic has exacerbated. Biden would invite participation from a dedicated group of health experts, including mental health professionals and neuroscientists; educators, including early educators, and their unions; school technology practitioners and experts; civil rights advocates; Indian education experts; foundations and the private sector; and families, students, and community advocates. Biden would request its recommendations on an accelerated time frame in order to provide guidance to states, tribal, and local governments as quickly as possible.
- *Launch a COVID-19 Educational Equity Gap Challenge Grant* to encourage states and tribal governments – in partnership with the education and broader community – to develop bold plans that adopt evidence-based policy recommendations and give all of our students the support they need to succeed.
- *Support community schools.* Community schools work with families, students, teachers and community organizations to identify families' unmet needs and then develop a plan to leverage community resources to address these needs in the school building, turning schools into community hubs. They provide holistic services like health and nutrition, mental health, and adult education-- services that are especially critical during and after COVID-19 to address the social,

emotional, academic, and health needs of students in a comprehensive way. Biden will provide resources to expand this model.

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