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May 11, 2020

U.S. Senate
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of NEA who are dedicated to teaching and supporting students at all times, and particularly during periods of crisis, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for the committee's May 12 hearing, "COVID-19: Safely Getting Back to Work and Back to School."

NEA members and all educators are worried about how their students are faring academically and emotionally during this time of illness and anxiety. At the same time, many education support professionals continue to prepare and distribute meals and learning materials to students; clean, maintain, and secure school buildings; and do other work that puts them in direct contact with students and families.

There is no question that *all* educators want desperately to go back to their students and schools—but they want to do so safely. The following measures are among those that we believe should be in place for schools to reopen:

- Communities considering reopening schools must already have enacted effective strategies for social-distancing strategies, COVID-19 testing, and contact tracing;
- Schools must be able to accommodate social distancing inside buildings and on school grounds, including during all classes, at meal time, and during recess;
- All educators must be provided with PPE, such as masks, and disinfectant items;
- Schools should consider providing face coverings for students, especially for those whose families cannot afford them;
- Schools must have preventive measures in place, including adequate equipment and supplies necessary for students and staff to apply hygiene measures (i.e., handwashing) that stem the spread of the virus;
- Schools must have specialized instructional support personnel, such as school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, to attend to students' social/emotional wellness;
- Educators must have space to attend to their own self-care and wellness needs *before* the return to in-person learning; and

- Pandemic EBT programs must continue through the summer and into the school year so that students who are unable to return to school for any reason can have access to nutritious meals.

These measures will offer at least some assurances that we are doing all we can to reopen schools across America safely.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association