

## **LDF RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING PROTOCOL FOR RACIALLY EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL REOPENINGS**

### **Funding: Congress must allocate additional funds for public schools to be able to safely educate and serve all students.**

- a) States must make sure that funds are **equitably** distributed to support students with the highest needs and institute robust oversight measures to encourage transparency and accountability.
- b) The Trump Administration and Governors must immediately cease efforts to divert funds from public schools to private schools.
- c) Given the continuing economic downturn and rise in food insecurity, the [U.S. Department of Agriculture must extend or grant new waivers](#) and Congress must provide the necessary funding and guidance to continue to provide free meals to students who need them without undue administrative burden and with proper social distancing.

### **Protecting Public Health: Before resuming in-person instruction, schools must ensure the physical safety of all students, staff, and communities.**

- a) The public health guidance is abundantly clear: Social distancing, handwashing, and face coverings are essential to reducing the spread of COVID-19. Schools must be frequently and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. The decision to open or close schools must be based on local data and public health guidance.
- b) Additional resources must be allocated to [ensure that all schools are properly retrofitted to reduce the spread of COVID-19](#) through social distancing, sufficient ventilation, and frequent handwashing. This should include resolving water quality issues. Schools must also have the necessary custodial and teaching staff to implement social distancing guidance and cleaning protocols.
- c) School re-opening plans and decisions must include ongoing parental, school staff, and community engagement. Districts must make specific efforts to ensure non-English speaking parents are informed and engaged.
- d) Schools in other countries that successfully re-opened did so with a tremendous amount of national support and by implementing rigorous protocols in schools and the greater community. It is worth noting that successful re-opening has occurred in countries where school conditions (e.g. class sizes; health and safety measures) and COVID infection rates are incomparable to that of the United States. Several countries have demonstrated that re-opening schools too soon may lead to dangerous school-based outbreaks of the coronavirus.

e) When the coronavirus has been sufficiently contained to allow for in-person learning, decisionmakers must ensure students have safe transportation to and from the building. This must take into account social distancing guidelines on school-operated transportation, and importantly, the specific needs of students that take public transportation to school.<sup>1</sup>

**Equitable Access to School Resources During COVID-19 School Closures: When in-person instruction is not safe, all students must have access to essential school-based services, including meals, and high-quality distance learning, including high-speed broadband internet, their own device, technology support, and culturally-responsive instruction.**

a) States should regularly track and report on students' access to high-speed broadband internet and appropriate devices necessary for distance learning, disaggregated by race, gender, household income and disability status.

b) Universal access should be maintained for all students. Districts should ensure equitable access to coursework, including access to International Baccalaureate, Gifted and Talented, and Advanced Placement programs. Students with disabilities and English Language Learners should continue to receive their supports and services virtually.

c) Teachers should receive additional professional development and continued support necessary to deliver high-quality distance learning instruction.

d) Students should be taught by district personnel who can sustain relationships with students and their families. Instruction should not be outsourced to private companies who are not invested in the students or school communities.

e) Schools must track student participation to distance learning, which includes documenting absenteeism; however, schools should address absenteeism non-punitively and reconnect students to school by identifying barriers and providing necessary supports to students and their families. Specifically, states should issue guidance that limits the use of punitive responses to absenteeism and truancy including referrals to the criminal justice system.

f) Any partial re-opening should prioritize access for high-needs students, such as certain students with disabilities whose services cannot be delivered virtually and

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<sup>1</sup> Research shows that the COVID-19 death rate for people who use public transportation is 10 times greater than those who use any other method (see Christopher R. Knittle and Bora Ozaltun, 2020. *What Does and Does Not Correlate with COVID-19 Deaths*, NBER Working Paper No. 27391). Moreover, a substantial portion of the Black-White racial disparities in COVID-19 cases is accounted for by the use of public transportation (see John McLaren, 2020. *Racial Disparity in COVID-19 Deaths: Seeking Economic Roots with Census Data*, NBER Working Paper No. 27407).

students who need the safety and supervision of in-person school including children of essential workers and students experiencing homelessness.

g) During school closures, school districts must ensure that students have continued access to meals and other essential school-based services. School districts should ensure that meals are distributed in ways that are equitable and allow for social distancing.

**Instruction and Assessment: Instruction and assessment must be reimagined to center anti-racism and student engagement, and address learning loss.**

a) Assessments must rely less on high stakes testing, and instead emphasize culturally relevant diagnostic tools to identify areas of need and performance-based assessments that engage students and allow them to demonstrate their learning.

b) Instruction must involve some real time or synchronous instruction, so that students can interact with teachers, as well as small groups and/or group projects that foster intergroup interaction.

c) Schools should have specific evidence-based strategies and direct additional resources to address the expected COVID-19 learning loss for the most vulnerable students. Schools should not rely on grade retention or “holding” students back to address gaps in learning, nor should students be placed into inflexible tracks.

d) School staff should implement culturally responsive teaching methods and ensure the curriculum is racially inclusive.

**Social and Emotional Learning: Schools must be equipped with the necessary resources to mitigate the stress and trauma stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic school closures.**

a) School re-opening plans must also include strategies to address the overall mental health and well-being of Black students, who have been disproportionately impacted by the economic and health consequences of the pandemic as well as the personal and collective trauma resulting from high-profile incidents of police violence against Black people.

b) Trauma informed care should be integrated into both online and in-person schooling to meet the mental health needs of students and to create a positive and healthy school culture.

c) Distance and in-person learning must promote positive school climates where students’ social and emotional needs are met with student supports, not exclusionary discipline practices. Therefore, school districts should institute a

moratorium on all suspensions and modify school discipline policies to be trauma informed and supportive.

d) Staff resources should be shifted from school resource officers to nurses, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. [Ninety percent](#) of students are in public schools where the number of counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists do not meet recommended professional standards. Three million students attend schools with police, but no school nurse. Fourteen million students attend schools with school police, but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.

**Safeguarding Workplace Protections in Schools: Educator safety, retention, and training must be a priority for all school districts, especially for Black educators and the educators of Black students.**

a) School staff should be involved in decision-making regarding school reopenings and their rights to safe and healthy working environments must be protected.

b) Educators, especially those in under-resourced, high-poverty schools and with experience working with students of color should be protected from layoffs and forced retirement to lower the likelihood that vulnerable students will lose access to high-quality teachers. The prevention of teacher shortages is essential to implement potentially life-saving measures, such as smaller class sizes, and to avoid a further widening of the racial achievement gap.

c) Requiring students' families and school employees to sign liability waivers is not a substitute for implementing public health guidance. School staff must be free to express their concerns about safety and readiness for re-opening without fear of retaliation.