

March 18, 2021

Jeffrey Zients
Coordinator
COVID-19 Response Team
Executive Office of the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20201

David Kessler
Chief Science Officer
COVID-19 Response
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Anthony Fauci
Chief Medical Advisor
COVID-19 Response Team
Director, National Institute of Allergy
and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
31 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20814

Janet Woodcock
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20933

Dear Mr. Zients, Dr. Kessler, Dr. Fauci and Dr. Woodcock:

On behalf of seventeen national education, labor and health organizations, we write to ask the Biden Administration to urgently focus resources in developing a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine for use in children. Schools are best equipped to educate children in person, where, beyond the academic development of children and adolescents, schools play a critical role in building students' social and emotional skills, deliver reliable nutrition, provide health services, and addressing racial and social inequality. Unfortunately, until a COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for safe use in children, we are concerned that many students will continue to be educated in virtual settings or remain unable to participate in other important in-person academic and social opportunities that schools can provide.

There is an urgent need for all vaccine manufacturers to include children in COVID-19 vaccine trials, so that our nation's youngest can benefit from the vaccine as adults have. The same focus and effort the administration and manufacturers expended to enroll adults in COVID-19 vaccine trials must be replicated to enroll adolescents and younger children as soon as possible. While the likelihood of spreading the disease may vary among different aged children, children can and do spread the virus to household members, grandparents, teachers, and other children.

As school districts continue their work to offer in-person learning to students, we realize that some families are still afraid that even with vaccinated educators, appropriate testing procedures, and other recommended social distancing and mitigation measures in place, students may still spread COVID-19 amongst themselves and then spread the virus to susceptible family members, including siblings. The recent influx of federal funding has made school districts far more equipped to provide children with a high-quality online learning environment than at the start of the pandemic, we know there is simply no replacement for the academic, social and emotional benefits a child receives attending school in-person, particularly for young children. As the Centers for Disease Control have noted, when children

are educated in-person students feel more connected and safer, which is associated with lower levels of depression, social anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

The rapid development of a vaccine could also lead to other educational benefits for children. Once a vaccine for children is widely available, schools can reintroduce long-shuttered extracurricular activities, which research has shown leads to improved academic outcomes, improved school-based behavior and greater engagement of students. Parents of children with disabilities who may have underlying health conditions may also opt to continue learning virtually until a vaccine is available, despite the tremendous benefits in-person instruction would have for their child. Furthermore, our Black, Latinx and Asian students are returning to in-person instruction at disproportionately lower rates than White students. If the quality of instruction they receive virtually is not as high quality as the in-person instruction they would receive in school, academic achievement gaps for these students will continue to be exacerbated.

Educators will also directly benefit from swift vaccine development. Besides the direct impacts of online learning on students, parents whose children remain unvaccinated may remain reluctant or unable to re-join the workforce. Teachers and other school support staff are included in the population of parents who have had to work few hours or not work at all to support their children's online learning and safety when schools were physically closed. The sooner a vaccine is authorized for children, the sooner these educators can send their children back for in-person learning and extended care programs, and we can have these much-needed educators and staff back in our schools.

We hope the Administration continues to take steps to make it possible for every child to receive safe and effective in-person instruction.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
EDGE Consulting Partners
Healthy Schools Campaign
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Social Workers
National Education Association
National Superintendents Roundtable
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health