

Op-Ed: Patience, Caution and Flexibility Needed as Some Schools Reopen Next Week



As some school districts look to begin to reopen as early as next week, state Senator Tony Hwang, R-28th District, offers the following statement.

I am thankful for all the work completed by Connecticut State Department of Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona and his staff. There are a number of published documents and helpful links right on the SDE website to help educate parents and caregivers. The information includes important protocols established through a close partnership between Connecticut's Departments of Public Health and Education.

The SDE reported that over 391,000 students participated in virtual learning to finish up the 2019-2020 school year, which is over 74 percent of the total students in Connecticut. With the assistance of federal and state aid, the SDE is working to get devices into the hands of students in need as well as establishing a way for these students to

access the internet and educational content.

There is helpful information on the SDE website which covers:

— Interim guidance on handling Covid-19 situations

—Mask wearing policy

— How music and gym classes are being handled

I would recommend that concerned citizens access handy links to further information and resources at the newly launched CT Learning Hub.

As we enter this new school year, my biggest advice I can offer families is to remain patient, cautious and flexible. The local school, district leadership, state department and others are working hard to ensure that all children have access to the materials, technology and social-emotional support that they need following a nearly-six month break from the classroom.

In the past weeks, I have heard feedback from differing viewpoints ranging from “excitement for going back to school” to worries about “how can I send my child to school with so much uncertainty” to the practicality of “why are masks required in combination with social distancing and cohorting?”

We must heed the insights and perspectives from our teachers who are on the front lines returning to school. They are directly interacting with children as they continue to work through the challenges of learning and growing during a global pandemic, and we must acknowledge their concerns.

I can appreciate the challenges the CT SDE is facing trying to put forth a clear, specific plan when the stakes are truly unknown. Fears of a second wave of the virus this fall are possible and troubling, and we need to listen to local educational shareholders as decisions are made and modified in the best interests of our students and school staff.

I am working with Cardona and staff on the 15 questions I sent based on conversations I have had with local superintendents, boards of education, town leaders and constituents. The CT SDE will be providing additional written advice in the next week and I look forward to sharing it with you.

The safety of students, teachers and staff and the peace of mind of parents are not negotiable. It is my hope that we can be safe and respectful of the different decisions families must make to support their students' learning in these unprecedented times.

Below are links detailing my efforts to ensure a safe return to school.

Sen. Hwang Calls for Specifics and Answers following CT State Education Commissioner's Webinar on "Back to School" Plan, July 9, 2020 <https://bit.ly/2YLGdcR>

Senator Hwang Insists on Caution and Local Input on Comprehensive "Back to School" Plan, July 2, 2020 <https://bit.ly/2Wse0qn>

Hwang represents the 28th Senate District in the Connecticut General Assembly. Hwang is Deputy Minority Senate Leader and the ranking legislative leader on the Public Safety and Security Committee and Higher Education & Employment Committees and also serves as a member of the Transportation Committee.