



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



November 2, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Now that we are entering our third month of school, I want to take a moment to check in on some of the practices that are allowing our students to benefit from in-person and remote education. As you know, a student centered approach is at the core of Connecticut's commitment to our schools. We rely on our entire school community to support our students: all of our educators and staff, including but not limited to, paraprofessionals, specialists, climate and family support staff, custodians, bus drivers, and food service staff each play an important role in the social emotional, academic, and healthy development of our students in CT.

Amidst the pandemic, staff members may be unable to continue in-person employment— whether due to their own health condition, a recommendation for quarantine, or the need to care for a child whose school or daycare is closed due to the pandemic. Continuity of access to teachers with whom the child is familiar, including consistent paraeducators support, is crucial for the success of our students. One way to support student access is to grant flexibility to the greatest extent feasible to any staff member willing and able to work remotely while under quarantine. Another is to ensure that our hourly staff, such as paraeducators, are being offered as many hours as possible, even if it means allowing some of that work to happen remotely. If public health data requires fully remote instruction, these existing staff members can provide daily contact to students to provide the social emotional and the academic support needed.

School districts should continue their focus on retaining connections with students during the pandemic by reimagining employee work to support students' educational needs. Of course, school districts will need to consider the obligations in their staff Collective Bargaining Agreements, the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA), [the Pregnancy Discrimination Act](#) (PDA), [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (FFCRA), and the [Pandemic Unemployment Insurance](#) (PUA). Please make sure you are very familiar with and providing your employees access to the newer protections required by the FFCRA, with answers to Frequently Asked Questions available here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-questions>. If it is helpful to speak with someone in my agency regarding resources on these rules, please let me know. School leaders are also reminded to consult with their board counsel because the CARES Act requires that school districts "to the greatest extent practicable, continue to pay its employees and contractors" while school is disrupted by the pandemic. While this is important due to the attestation school districts made under the CARES Act to access funding, it is most essential because our students' success will require creative reimagining of all supports available. In cases where continued full-time employment is not reasonably practicable, employers should consider the State of Connecticut's [Shared Work program](#), which prevents layoffs by allowing employers to temporarily reduce employee hours and use partial unemployment benefits to supplement lost wages.

Students learn and grow best in the supportive space of a school community - both in-school and remote. Thank you for doing everything possible to keep the school community intact as students confront so many changes in their lives during the COVID pandemic. Your continued advocacy, unwavering commitment, and hard work on behalf of our students is inspiring and greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona
Commissioner of Education