

Press Release

August 14, 2020

On August 10, 2020, the Little Rock Education Association members voted to take action. Today, the educators of the Little Rock School District stand ready, able, and willing to teach our students virtually beginning on August 24th. We refuse to enter unsafe building that put our students and ourselves at risk of contracting COVID-19. It is unethical and immoral to try to force us to do so. Our educators agree that they may enter buildings without students in attendance to teach virtually from their classrooms in order to utilize their materials if that is their individual choice. However, congregating students and staff in buildings is not safe at this time.

We stand in solidarity with our Classified Staff and demand that their jobs are maintained and that they are utilized in a way that prioritizes their work to assisting our families of highest need.

The educators agree to return to in-person learning on a Phased-In basis only after the Pulaski County positivity rate remains below 5% per day for 14 consecutive days.

The scientific data currently indicates that our school settings are dangerous right now and pose an enormous risk of infection to our students and our educators. These facts exist that cannot be disputed:

- There are 6582 active cases in Arkansas.
- There have been 582 deaths in Arkansas from COVID-19.
- Pulaski County has a positivity rate of 15.53% currently and the state of Arkansas has an overall positivity rate of 10.9%.
- Arkansas has a very large number of new cases-22.4% per 100,000 people
- There are currently only 6 of 75 total counties in the entire state with a positivity rate of less than 5%, which is the CDC recommendation for reopening schools.
- 549,035 individuals would be put at risk for illness and/or death if schools reopen now.

The greatest risk for contraction of COVID-19 is with our children of greatest need. Once again, these are our high poverty and Black, Indigenous, and people of color populations that will be most affected.

Our schools are not safe. The Governor is not interested in making them safe. He views our beloved students as expendable "cases." He views our professional educators as expendable. We will not be forced to expose our beloved students or ourselves to a disease that has possible lifelong complications that are unknown at this point. We, the people, are more than a "case." We are grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, and daughters. We matter and so do our students. Not our children. Not on our watch.

Teresa Knapp Gordon, President