



875 E. Pontiac Drive
Murray, Utah 84107-5299
Tel: 801-266-4461
Fax: 801-265-2249
myUEA.org

Heidi Matthews, *President*
Renee Pinkney, *Vice President*
Jay Blain, *Co-interim Deputy Executive Director*
Heather Shepherd, *Co-interim Deputy Executive Director*
Michael Harman, *NEA State Director*
Mindy Layton, *NEA State Director*

December 7, 2020

The Honorable Governor Gary Herbert
Utah State Capitol Complex
350 North State Street, Suite 200
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Gov. Herbert,

The Utah Education Association opposes the easing of school quarantine recommendations until such modifications are supported by clear data.

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with health officials and Governor's Office staff last Friday, December 4, to discuss proposed changes to quarantine outlined in the COVID-19 School Manual. As it was presented to us, the policy change would eliminate the requirement to quarantine when a student comes in close contact with another student who has tested positive for COVID-19, if both individuals were wearing masks.

This proposed change raises several concerns, which we shared during our discussion on Friday:

- The impact of this change on school safety is unknown. It is not clear how this change may impact the health and safety of educators, school employees and students in a school building. A change to quarantine guidelines that appears to decrease the safety of educators will result in greater anxiety and stress, as well as potentially increase the number of educators at risk of COVID-19 infection.
- There does not appear to be any data supporting this change. No data has yet been provided to show how this change impacts the rate of transmission when one student is positive for COVID-19 but asymptomatic and the others in the classroom are masked. Without knowing the rate of transmission in these circumstances, it is difficult to know the risk educators and students face if the number of asymptomatic students increases because there is no quarantine requirement.
- The change would add to the anxiety of already-stressed educators. Large numbers of teachers, especially in urban areas where case numbers are high, are expressing grave concerns about the risk of COVID-19 exposure in schools. Moving to zero quarantine days for in-school exposure to COVID-19 exacerbates this problem. The change sends a very disturbing message to teachers who are already anxious for their safety and the safety of their high-risk loved ones.

We all want to return to in-person learning as quickly as it is safe to do so. Any modifications to the COVID-19 School Manual should be based on clear science and data. Like previous policy determinations, changes should be made with “an abundance of caution.” As COVID-19 cases in many areas of Utah continue to spike, now is not the time to change school quarantine recommendations. We strongly oppose any such change at this time and ask for your reconsideration.

Sincerely,



Heidi Matthews, M. Ed.
UEA President

HM:hs

CC: Karen Peterson, Education Advisor to the Governor
Commander William Lanier, Senior Epidemiologist, U.S. Public Health Service
Jill Parker, Executive Director, Utah Association of Local Health Departments
Heather Borski, Division Director, Division of Disease Control and Prevention
Renee Pinkney, UEA Vice President
Jay Blain, UEA Co-interim Deputy Executive Director and Director of Policy and Research
Heather Shepherd, UEA Co-interim Deputy Executive Director and Executive Assistant
Dr. Sara Jones, UEA Director of Education Excellence and Government Relations
Mike Kelley, UEA Director of Communications and Public Relations