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September 18, 2020

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

Dear Gov Herbert:

On behalf of Utah educators, the Utah Education Association calls on you to increase state oversight and compliance measures to protect the health and safety of public school students, educators and school staff.

As you rightly stated in your Sept. 17 press briefing, the recent spike in COVID-19 cases is a “red flag warning.” It is concerning that such outcomes were predictable given the lack of consistent and enforceable health mandates for Utah public schools.

According to the Utah Department of Health COVID-19 School Manual, a “school outbreak” occurs when “15 people test positive for COVID-19 across multiple settings in the school” (p. 95). The manual identifies the following recommendations to protect students, teachers and employees at the school:

- The people who tested positive should isolate until they have been fever-free for 24 hours and it has been at least 10 days since they first got sick or tested positive
- The people who were exposed should quarantine for 14 days
- No student can go to school for 14 days from the last date of exposure
- They should clean the whole school using the cleaning guidelines

In many cases, teachers reported to work believing these guidelines would be followed. And yet, at least four high schools have now exceeded this threshold of exposure and their school district boards are electing to ignore these recommendations. The UEA’s concern is that a recommendation can be disregarded despite the negative impacts on the health and safety of staff and students.

On July 31, the UEA issued Five Key Requirements for a Safe Return to In-person Learning. These requirements were shared with you in a meeting on August 5 and also with the Education Interim Committee in a presentation on August 19. However, the continued lack of state-level accountability and oversight for the implementation of district safety plans remains a serious concern.

Utah code empowers local health departments to take an active role in school outbreaks. Specifically, 26A-1-114 (3) states “the local health department has the following duties regarding public and

private schools within its boundaries: (a) enforce all ordinances, standards, and regulations pertaining to the public health of persons attending public and private schools.”

We are hearing from many teachers who say they feel helpless, disrespected and unsafe. We call on you to protect students, educators and school staff by establishing clear, enforceable requirements based on guidance from health professionals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heidi Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heidi Matthews, M.Ed.
UEA President

HM:hs

CC: Karen Peterson, Education Advisor to the Governor
Renee Pinkney, UEA Vice President
Dr. Brad Bartels, UEA Executive Director
Jay Blain, UEA Director of Policy and Research
Chase Clyde, UEA Director of Government Relations and Political Action
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