

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 17, 2020

Dr. Robert R. Redfield, MD  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Redfield,

We urge you to immediately refine national COVID-19 guidance to holistically address the need for the adoption of stringent mitigation strategies for businesses, schools, and institutions of higher education. The current CDC guidance on school reopening acknowledges many critical reasons to get students back in the classroom yet treats school systems as an afterthought in addressing community-wide spread. Schools should not be an isolated consideration in guidance, but rather a major factor in whether to fully open any locality.

As communities seek to safely reopen, schools should be a top-tier priority. Rather than rushing to open schools in dangerous situations, the Administration must do more to get our students back into the classrooms *safely*. Updated guidance should advise states and localities to restrict settings or points of contagion *until* schools can safely reopen. Levels of prioritization for openings and closures should be dictated so that localities know definitively when it is appropriate to close or open various establishments within the communities. For the safety of everyone (including nonessential businesses and gatherings), schools should be restricted until community transmission is low enough to safely open community-wide establishments. Parents across this nation fail to understand how bars, churches and other social settings can be open with no restrictions while schools are forced to do the responsible thing and remain shuttered.

Current guidance leaves school districts struggling with the decision of how to open safely while other community settings are fully open. Many districts are applying the current recommendations haphazardly, moving from hybrid in-person to remote learning, as a result of legitimate fears for safety due to persistently high rates of community transmission. Students of color and public-school students in low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have access to the resources available in more affluent families and schools during full remote learning, which [exacerbates](#) the inequities these students face. Some communities may be able to safely reopen when community spread is sufficiently controlled and strong mitigation strategies remain in place, including effective contact tracing, quarantine, and isolation procedures. Other communities may be at a point of contagion that requires a more stringent mitigation strategy, including re-instating nonessential business restrictions or closures, before schools can safely open.

Throughout the pandemic, there have been inconsistent, concealed and contradictory guidance related to mitigating the spread of COVID-19, and our country continues to suffer. A September 21, 2020 Government Accountability Office [report](#) found that CDC recommendations for K-12 school opening “[appear] misaligned with risk-based decision-making” and that “unclear federal guidance and messaging risks contributing to conflict, confusion, and indecision for schools”.

It is simply unacceptable to place the burden of fighting COVID-19 on our children and the educators dedicated to serving them. Tragically, there have already been deaths from COVID-19 associated with unsafe school reopenings. The long-term negative societal and economic impacts associated with school closures will ripple throughout our economy. We must do better with science-based recommendations to states and localities regarding community-wide mitigation to limit exposure in other settings, so that we can prioritize safe school reopenings in communities across the nation.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Robert C. “Bobby” Scott  
Member of Congress



Cindy Axne  
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



Grace Meng  
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

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Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress

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James P. McGovern  
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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

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Barbara Lee  
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