

September 2, 2020

Dr. Margie Vandeven
Commissioner of Education
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
205 Jefferson Street
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480
(Delivered via e-mail)

Commissioner Vandeven:

We appreciate the department's efforts to support students and educators during the pandemic. In the spring, as educators worked to adapt to virtual education, the department waived regulatory requirements allowing educators to focus on student instruction and health. We have agreed with most decisions related to COVID 19, with the exception of significantly lowering the education requirements for substitute teachers.

As our state enters the sixth month of the pandemic and a new school year begins, many parents are being asked to choose between in-person or virtual education for their children. Parents are weighing the potential risk of exposure to COVID-19 against the benefits of available educational options. Many educators are considering the same risks and benefits as they make decisions for their own families. These decisions are not made lightly and involve a spectrum of difficult choices.

To make the best decision possible, parents and educators must have accurate and timely information about COVID-19 exposures in schools. However, there is no centralized repository of COVID-19 information for listing COVID-19 incidents in schools, nor is there a requirement for districts to publicly report any COVID-19 information. How are parents to make an informed decision if critical information is not readily available to them?

Recognizing that parents and educators needed information regarding potential risks, the **Missouri National Education Association** began collecting and reporting COVID-19 exposures in our schools. Our [“Closures and Exposures”](#) report is available on our website and is updated weekly. Since June, **our report identifies 59 exposure incidents in school districts**. This number is incredibly distressing, yet we know it is not a comprehensive picture of school-related COVID-19 exposures in our state.

MNEA believes the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in conjunction with Governor Parson, should act to ensure parents have accurate and reliable information about COVID-19 exposure in schools. We propose DESE require school districts to report any potential COVID-19 exposure of students or staff to the department. The department should regularly publish a report of school-related COVID-19 incidents online where they are accessible to parents and educators. The report should include:

- The specific school building or school activity where the exposure occurred.
- The date of the exposure.

- The number of students or staff exposed.
- Actions the school district is taking to inform parents and staff.
- Safety precautions the district is implementing to limit exposure and spread to others.
- The report should redact any personal or identifying information to protect the individual privacy of students and staff.

Missouri NEA strongly believes parents and educators deserve access to all the information necessary to inform decisions about their children's education and families' well-being. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. Please do not hesitate to call me with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Phil Murray
Missouri NEA President

cc: State Board of Education