

## Navigating Uncertain Circumstances

### *Educator Concerns about Opening Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Georgia educators know that schools are essential for students and communities. However, their strong desire to reunite with students in classrooms is matched by their significant concerns about the health risks of the COVID-19 virus. School start dates are quickly approaching, and many educators lack information about district plans to address health and safety issues and lack confidence in the district opening plans that have been shared. Educators have not yet had the opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and school leaders to discuss opening strategies, share concerns, collaborate on solutions, and build the trust necessary to navigate unprecedented challenging circumstances. More than 16,000 Georgia educators shared their perspectives about opening schools in a PAGE survey that ran June 26 to July 6 (full survey analysis is available [here](#)). Their responses make clear that Georgia educators:

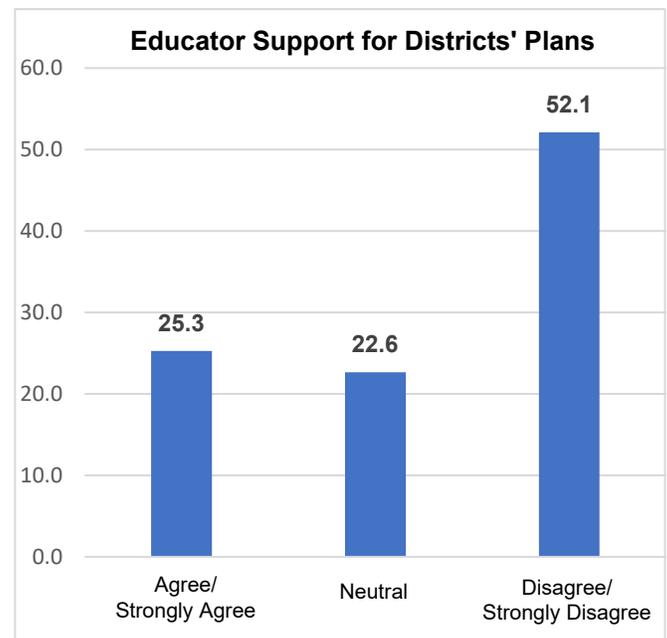
- Have limited information about school opening plans
- Are committed to their students and schools yet have significant concerns about returning to the classroom during the pandemic
- Need additional supports to provide effective online instruction

### Information Gap on District Plans

Educators have limited information about their districts' plans to open schools. Fifty-one percent report that their districts have released plans. More than two-thirds of educators say their districts solicited their input in plans. Many districts included school nurses on their planning teams.

Many educators do not give their districts' plans high marks. About 52 percent of educators in districts that have released plans do not believe the plans fully address the risks of COVID-19.

Lack of information about specific action steps may contribute to educator perceptions of districts' opening plans. Many educators in districts that have released plans say there are not clear action steps to safely and effectively respond when/if students and/or staff contract the virus. Many also report they do not know if districts will provide students and staff with personal protective equipment or how students with extra needs will be served.



## **Educator Commitment and Concern**

Educators are committed to serving students in their classrooms. Nearly 78 percent of all educators say they expect to return to school. Nineteen percent are uncertain, and three percent have chosen not to come back. High-risk educators are less likely to be back in the classroom, while those who are not high-risk are more likely to return.

About 30 percent of all educators self-identify as high-risk for the coronavirus. Veteran educators and educators of color are more likely to report being high-risk. Many educators also have family members who are high-risk. In total, about 53 percent of educators report that either they or a household member is high-risk.

## **Professional Learning Needed for Quality Online Instruction**

Many educators feel prepared to provide quality online instruction, but sizable portions do not – or feel only partially ready. Many teachers want professional learning in developing and delivering engaging online instruction and using instructional technology. Over half want high-quality online resources for their content area and grade level.

**44%**

Classroom teachers who feel prepared to provide quality online instruction.

Ensuring that staff and students have devices as well as home internet connectivity is critical for remote instruction. About 14 percent of classroom teachers and nearly 39 percent of paraprofessionals need laptops. Reliable internet connectivity is a problem for about 11 percent of educators. Approximately 63 percent of educators cite internet connectivity for students as a critical need, and about 56 percent report that students need devices.

Thirty-seven percent of educators have a child who needs assistance with schoolwork or have a child who needs childcare. If schools shift to full virtual instruction, these educators will need support to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

## **Delay Opening School Due to Spread and to Prepare for Safe Return**

Educator feedback acquired through the survey and their direct conversations with PAGE staff highlight the significant challenges to successfully resolving the desire to be in classrooms with students and the legitimate safety and health concerns for all in the school environment. Data shows the path forward includes delaying the start of school to allow time for the potential reduction of the spike in Georgia COVID-19 cases and opening schools with virtual only instruction in communities with substantial spread of COVID-19. Data also strongly supports further refinement of return-to-school safety plans with enhanced direct communication on these plans, following public health mask guidance, and the accommodation of high-risk staff through assignment in virtual and non-contact roles.

Though returning to Georgia's classrooms is an important step in adapting to the continued presence of COVID-19, doing so must be accomplished in measured ways that provide the safest possible environment to effectively protect our educators and student populations.

*PAGE Recommendations for School Opening available [HERE](#)*