



VIA EMAIL

July 30, 2020

TO: State Superintendent of Schools Richard Woods
State Board of Education Chair Scott Sweeney
State Board of Education Members

RE: Educator Leave with Pay Due to COVID-19 Exposure or Infection

Dear Superintendent Woods, Chair Sweeney, and Board Members:

On behalf of 97,000 members throughout Georgia and the students they are proud to serve, PAGE writes today to share urgent concerns regarding educator leave policies and to recommend immediate changes aimed at curbing virus transmission, protecting students and school staff, and allowing schools to open and stay open. The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (FFCRA) allows fulltime educators to take up to 80 hours of paid leave if they are subject to COVID-19 quarantine or isolation orders, have been advised by healthcare providers to self-quarantine due to COVID-19, or have virus symptoms and are seeking a medical diagnosis.

As the pandemic continues, particularly when Georgia schools begin providing face-to-face instruction, PAGE anticipates that many school employees will be directly exposed to or be infected by COVID-19. This will require educators to quarantine repeatedly and fully exhaust 80 hours of FFCRA paid leave, likely with the first exposure or infection. When FFCRA leave is exhausted, any leave required by quarantine or exposure protocols will reduce accrued sick leave, even if educators are exposed to or contract the virus at work in a school setting. In order for schools to remain open and serve students, some educators may need to quarantine multiple times throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Thus, these educators will exhaust FFCRA and personal accrued sick leave, leading to financial penalty and a disincentive to report disease exposure or symptoms and a disincentive to return to onsite work.

PAGE strongly recommends that the State Board promulgate a rule allowing educators who exhaust FFCRA leave to take a leave with pay if quarantine or absence from on-site work is necessitated due to COVID-19 exposure. PAGE also recommends that when educators are exposed to the virus but are asymptomatic and able to work remotely, school districts allow these employees to work remotely without penalty to FFCRA or accrued sick leave. Students should continue to get quality instruction from their own teacher rather than having a substitute teacher fill in especially when virtual instruction is already taking place.

As part of the PAGE [pandemic-related school opening recommendations](#), PAGE advised school districts to reconsider requiring staff to take leave when making accommodations for staff with underlying health conditions and to establish clear guidelines on leave policies, including the range of available leave and any impact on compensation. PAGE further recommended that districts allow virtual-only teachers who can accomplish their work remotely outside the school setting to do so to limit their exposure to others, especially when that assignment is to accommodate a high-risk health condition.

Reconsideration of and changes to district leave and remote work policies are needed to combat COVID-19 and enable schools to open more safely and remain open, serving students. Georgia must continue to innovate to combat the virus and reduce risks of providing face-to-face instruction in schools. We respectfully ask the State Board of Education to work quickly in this regard. PAGE stands ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Craig Harper", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Craig Harper
PAGE Executive Director