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Joint Statement From Michigan Education Organizations – AFT-Michigan, Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators, Middle Cities Education Association, and Michigan Education Association

The following statement is from leadership of organizations representing Michigan’s PK-12 Schools: David Hecker, AFT-Michigan President; Don Wotruba, MASB Executive Director; Tina Kerr, MASA Executive Director; Ray Telman, Middle Cities Executive Director; Paula Herbart, MEA President.

Since this pandemic began, it has been our most fervent wish to *safely* reopen our schools for in-person learning. Educators agree that face-to-face time with students is vastly superior for the academic and overall well-being of Michigan’s children. Containing the spread of this deadly disease was – and continues to be – job one, which is why we’ve supported the steps Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and our state have taken to fight COVID-19.

From pauses on a variety of in-person activities, to staying home and avoiding social contact with others, to the simple act of wearing a mask, we all took those steps to help beat the coronavirus – and recent trends show good progress in our state because of those steps. Combined with educators being up next for vaccination against the disease, it’s time to work together to plan how to safely reopen schools.

The keys to that sentence are safety and planning. Even with vaccinations and declining infections, we must continue to take aggressive steps to mitigate spread of the virus. We applaud the state’s release of updated, simplified safety guidance for schools, as well as more than \$1 billion in federal funding to implement these mitigation steps, especially when it comes to strict infection-control protocols.

This week’s news that vaccination of school employees will begin next week is similarly welcome news, along with the state’s intention of providing rapid testing options for interested districts and educators. With a new variant of the virus on the rise, however, we must remain vigilant and be 100% committed



to safety measures as we monitor local health data. Keeping students, families and educators safe and healthy is something that research shows schools across this state have proven doable and must continue to be our top priority.

With half a year of school left, now is the time to work together at the local level with all stakeholders – teachers, support staff, administrators, board members, health professionals and community members – to make sure we have safe and solid plans to return to in-person learning. As statewide organizations, we're committed to supporting our local members in that planning process toward Gov. Whitmer's March 1 goal of as much in-person learning as feasible, keeping the best interests of students at heart and with a close eye to everyone's health and safety.

From students to parents to educators, the burnout of this unprecedented school year is real. If we want to help address that by returning to safe, in-person learning, everyone has a part to play by masking up, maintaining social distance, limiting gatherings, and not letting our guard down against this pandemic that has claimed the lives of too many family and friends.

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