

To our Nation’s Educators and Education Stakeholders:

Thank you for giving your all for students during this unprecedented year.

As the Commissioner of Education in Connecticut, I experienced firsthand the disruptions schools and communities faced as the pandemic unfolded. As a former teacher and principal, I understand how challenging it has been to work under these conditions. As a parent of a daughter and son in high school, I know how critical it is to stay engaged with students, and to help them stay engaged in learning.  And, as your Secretary of Education, I pledge to do everything I can to listen, to learn and to *act* in the best interests of our nation’s students.

Our top priority in the coming months must be to work together to safely reopen all schools for in-person learning, beginning with children in grades K-8. The data, and daily experience, show our children need us to find a way to take this step. My career experiences have taught me that education is primarily a state and local endeavor, and I know students, educators, administrators, staff, and families have performed heroically under these difficult circumstances to take steps toward reopening and to support students wherever they are learning. From a federal perspective, our role is to provide support, guidance, and directions on how to do it safely.

I also know that leadership and support from the federal government is needed in the immediate and long-term – so you have the funds, facts and guidance to make the best decisions for your students and communities. As part of this effort, the Department has released our [COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](https://nam11.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ed.gov%2Fdocuments%2Fcoronavirus%2Freopening.pdf%3F_cldee%3Da3Nob2x0eUBjc2JhLm9yZw%253D%253D%26recipientid%3Dcontact-d205d9747bf6e9118127005056b02a09-fb77a92832b946d3bb6416f04e1a77fa%26esid%3D92247b19-8e6d-eb11-8141-005056b02a09&data=04%7C01%7CCSlaven%40nsba.org%7Cadf128107b764f31187408d8de66dc9f%7C00932d080ddd44afb700c3c0549e4e68%7C0%7C0%7C637503880663391704%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=YmatdHMX9i01y33sVdI88%2FpnOGZLnkf9DRiTxdRvXx8%3D&reserved=0), to help you implement the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s K-12 operational strategy](https://nam11.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschools-childcare%2Foperation-strategy.html&data=04%7C01%7CCSlaven%40nsba.org%7Cadf128107b764f31187408d8de66dc9f%7C00932d080ddd44afb700c3c0549e4e68%7C0%7C0%7C637503880663391704%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=ExEdpAjxxD0Ev1OOxoWCBBTmR3lItev%2BiPKtShWjbXo%3D&reserved=0). We’re working on the second volume, which will provide schools with practical implementation plans to address the extraordinary disruption created by COVID-19 for students, educators, and parents — especially for historically underserved students and communities that have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

Together, we can ensure our efforts are always grounded in science and proven practices, so we do what is most effective for students and families.  As we open classrooms, the health and safety of our students and educators must remain the highest priority.  The research is conclusive: when they can do so safely, students are better off learning in school, in person, rather than remotely. The need is most acute in our undeserved communities and among students of color, who have suffered disproportionately during this time.

In Connecticut, we offered clear, expert-driven guidance and communicated with teachers and staff, administrators, parents, and students. We connected medical experts with schools, and supported flexibility for districts to revise and revisit plans based on local health data. Our approach to tackling this issue nationwide must be the same.

In addition to helping you create conditions in which students can safely return to the classroom, we’ll work to close the large funding gap between majority-white and non-white districts, improve teacher diversity, ensure teachers receive the support and respect they need and deserve, expand access to high-quality preschool, and support high-quality career and technical education.

These ambitious goals and needed changes can only be accomplished if we remove silos in education, share our breakthroughs and successes, and cultivate schools and colleges as places of innovation.  States have always been leaders of innovation, and the pandemic has spurred schools, institutions, and individuals to find new ways to meet students’ needs.  We will capture and elevate those stories through a best-practices clearinghouse.  And, I will always keep students at the forefront of all we do. (Here’s a [video](https://nam11.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FjmS6kT_4hZA&data=04%7C01%7CCSlaven%40nsba.org%7Cadf128107b764f31187408d8de66dc9f%7C00932d080ddd44afb700c3c0549e4e68%7C0%7C0%7C637503880663401698%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=%2FbhGCXZs14q3tcMttkRrKgeDugOE73%2B9pZLqGQEYt%2Fc%3D&reserved=0) about the path ahead.)

I have full confidence in our shared ability, and in the power of our partnership. I want you to know that you have a strong advocate in Washington who is committed to communication, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, and results. Together, we will emerge from this crisis stronger than ever. We will empower our students as never before and equip them for the bright futures they deserve.

Once again, thanks for all you do. I’m eager to work with you to help all students achieve their dreams.

Sincerely,

Secretary Miguel Cardona