

Governor Ivey:

As we begin a new school year, our members are diligently working to provide the best possible learning environment for our students while also ensuring their health and safety to the best of their ability. In the absence of a health order, local superintendents are forced to make difficult – and often unpopular – decisions regarding safety protocols while also trying to return some normalcy to the school environment for our students.

As superintendents, we welcome and embrace local control when we believe our communities and school systems have the necessary means and knowledge to determine what those best practices should be. However, when faced with dynamics such as the data and consequences of the COVID-19 virus, we believe we are ill-equipped to make those healthcare decisions in the best interest of our communities. As we plan for a new school year, we continue to receive conflicting information and advice daily concerning potential masking protocols. As we enter the second full school year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we do not believe superintendents or local boards of education should be charged with making these health-related decisions.

Educators are trained to provide quality educational environments and instruction for the children of our communities. We are not trained or equipped to mandate community-related health protocols. For the benefit of all schools and communities, we believe COVID-19 health decisions, such as masking, should be determined by the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) to be enforced by a health order if masks are deemed necessary. The newly released CDC guidelines for schools recommends masks for unvaccinated students and educators. If past behavior is used as an indicator, ADPH will follow the CDC recommendations in their toolkit for schools due to be released in the coming weeks. However, your office has made it clear masks were not recommended for students. A consistent message on masking protocols from your office and ADPH would provide the support our superintendents need in their communities.

Last year, schools were under a mandate from your office along with public arenas, businesses, restaurants, churches, and a long list of other public services. In each case of public health, unilateral protocols were utilized to protect and support communities and citizenry. In the absence of these mandates, the steps recommended by ADPH and taken by schools will be undermined and thwarted as students leave school daily and participate in other activities and events without following those same recommended protocols outside of the school building.

As an association, we are not requesting you make masks mandatory. We are simply requesting your office and ADPH get on the same page and send out a concise, consistent message that our members can apply back home. We implore you and the ADPH to use the research and knowledge available to you to make the right decision based on the health and wellness of the great state of Alabama and our students. We appreciate your leadership through this pandemic and look forward to your continued guidance as we navigate the new school year.