



Jenni Benson, President

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## **Student Needs Not Being Met, Teachers Overwhelmed Nebraska Educators Reply to Teaching During Covid-19 Survey**

*Nearly 1 in 4 Teachers Say They Plan to Leave the Profession;  
More than 92 Percent Say Mask Mandate Needed*

November 16, 2020 – Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has Nebraska educators overwhelmed, worried about their students, and their health and safety, according to a recent survey from the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA).

Ninety-two percent of the more than 6,500 Nebraska public school educators who responded to the statewide survey say wearing masks should be mandated for both teachers and students. The NSEA conducted the survey from Oct. 23 – Nov. 2 to assess its' members views and concerns about teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The responses left little doubt that educators are at the breaking point,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson. “They are concerned that the needs of their students are not being met. They are worried about their health and safety and that of their students and families.

“Many teachers are having to teach students both in-person and remotely at the same time. That is exhausting teachers and making it nearly impossible to provide quality teaching and learning for students,” said Benson.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents from the Lincoln and Omaha public school districts do not believe their district’s current learning model is equitably meeting the needs of all students. Both districts include teaching in-person and remote learners at the same time. Statewide, which includes some districts that are offering only in-person teaching, 59 percent of survey respondents said they are concerned that their district’s learning model is not equitable for all students.

Benson said educators desperately want to do the best job they can for their students and thus are pleading for more time to plan and prepare for the changing teaching and learning models.

“Teachers are not provided adequate plan time and, because there is a shortage of substitute teachers, they are having to cover the classes of colleagues who are in quarantine or who are ill, so are losing the little plan time they do have. The situation is unsustainable.”

Eighty-six percent of the educators who participated in the survey reported feeling overwhelmed, stressed, frustrated or worried. A majority of respondents also said their school district is not listening to educator input regarding issues around teaching and learning during the pandemic. In some cases, teachers have left their teaching jobs just months into the school year.

“Some teachers have already left the profession this year and, without immediate action to help our educators, we are about to lose many, many more,” said Benson.

The survey showed that statewide nearly one in four teachers plan to leave the profession by the end of the school year. In Lincoln and Omaha, nearly one in three respondents said they plan to leave teaching.

Educators need public and school district support now more than ever, according to Benson.

“Teachers want to be in their classrooms with their students and they want to be safe. Their concerns and fears are real and legitimate,” said Benson.

On behalf of NSEA members and students across the state, Benson said the NSEA will file a petition for a declaratory order with the State Board of Education. The petition will request that the State Board declare the interventions and protocols recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) be adopted as the specific safety criteria under which schools will operate and remain open.

“To keep our schools open and operating safely, the State Board needs to set these basic standards that every school district must uphold for the health and safety of students and staff,” said Benson.

Benson and NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell said school administrators need to utilize the tools at their disposal to provide necessary relief for staff:

- Suspension of evaluations for non-probationary teachers;
- Make curriculum adjustments and relax pacing. Lost instructional time may be due to cleaning, sanitizing, mask breaks and technical issues with remote learners. Teachers know their students and will keep them advancing academically;
- Providing plan time – not more training – as allowed by the recent Nebraska Department of Education guidance posted at: <https://launchne.com/commish/>
- Include more administrators and certificated staff without full time teaching responsibilities in covering classes instead of taking away teacher plan time and increasing the numbers of students in class;
- Districts must provide factual COVID numbers to the public and school staff;
- Listen to educator input, show empathy and leadership.

Fennell said NSEA is joining with medical experts from UNMC and across Nebraska in asking the Governor to immediately issue Directed Health Measures that will call for:

- A statewide mask mandate;
- Limitation of 10 people for indoor or outdoor gatherings;
- Temporarily close bars and suspend indoor dining and launch a Takeout Nebraska campaign;
- Dedensify classrooms with alternative staffing and student attendance patterns, especially when students are eating.

In addition, the NSEA is calling for a moratorium on all in-person youth and high school sports and extracurricular activities until January.

**Survey Data available at:** <https://www.nsea.org/survey>

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