

**Written Testimony of**

**Kate Dias, President  
Connecticut Education Association**

**Before the Legislature**

**RE: Informational Hearing, on the Continuation of Emergency Declarations and Limited Executive Orders**

**February 8, 2022**

Good morning, Senator Daughtry Abrams, Representative Steinberg and esteemed members of the special hearing. My name is Kate Dias, and I am President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts in the state.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the voices of the diverse professionals who serve in our public schools. I recognize the difficulty you face in making this decision regarding masking in our schools. Our members, educators across the state, live in your communities and have shared their opinions in a survey we conducted last weekend. Just over half of our members—55%—favor a mask requirement. Forty percent are ready for the mask mandate to end, and 5% are not sure.

The majority of educators favor state-level control for the masking decision, to be made by the Department of Public Health, based on science. Fifty-nine percent of members want DPH to make the determination about masks based on statewide data, 32% do not agree with that procedure, and 9% are unsure.

If masking becomes optional, 62% of educators will continue to mask up, and 38% will not. Ultimately this means we should be looking for a statewide, science-based decision that reflects the needs of our school employees and the deep desire to keep our schools open.

Here we are, mere weeks beyond a 30% positivity rate. What we need to keep in mind is that a high positivity rate means teachers and students are missing from classrooms because they have COVID. This means educators must spend time covering extra classes for colleagues who are out due to COVID. It means students are missing lessons and not learning and will need to catch up when they test negative for COVID and are allowed back in school. Teachers talk every day about being overwhelmed and exhausted. This is because they are doing a job and a half every day, because absences are up, and substitutes are down. So, when we talk about mitigation strategies, it is because we want to keep schools open and educators available to educate.

Our survey told us, loud and clear, that ALL educators care about their students, their communities, and their families. We hear that loudly from all sides of this debate. Despite some of the awful things people have said to all of us in this last week, the truth is that we all want the same thing; we just believe the

answer is different. We should be able to disagree, without insults, and find a solution that relies on science, not opinion.

We are at a crossroads, dealing with the consequences of decisions. We work in buildings with poor ventilation, which is the reality of not addressing the problem of poor air quality in schools for years and in some cases, decades. Poor ventilation means we are reliant on windows—windows we can't open until the weather starts to warm up. Windows that sometimes don't open at all. Vaccination rates among our youngest students are very low., and we know this virus spreads more quickly among the unvaccinated, which is why we require masks to help slow the spread.

So, we are asking for a couple of real things. First, a science-based decision. One that relies on the Department of Public Health and CDC to establish standards based on when vaccination rates are high enough, positivity is low enough, and hospital rates are stable enough to deem masks optional.

Second, a little time so that we can open windows in our classrooms.

We also ask you to please carefully consider what the enforcement of those standards looks like and how you will feel with their implementation.

We expect that whatever rules you feel are safe enough for Connecticut's public school students, teachers, and staff would be safe enough for Connecticut's legislators.