

LOUISIANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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Governor's Coastal Advisory Commission
Louisiana State Law Institute
Louisiana International
Gulf Transfer Terminal Board

Raymond E. "Ray" Garofalo, Jr.
State Representative – District 103
Chairman, House Committee on Education

July 8, 2020

Ms. Sandy Holloway, President
State Board of Elementary and Secondary
Education
1201 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Dr. Cade Brumley, Superintendent
Louisiana Department of Education
1201 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Mr. Eddie Bonine, Executive Director
Louisiana High School Athletic Association
12720 Old Hammond Highway
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70816

I'm writing today to express my support for returning our students and athletes to the classroom and the sports fields as soon as possible for the upcoming school year in as safe a manner as practicable given the circumstances.

The response I've received from parents, educators, the public, and my colleagues, has been overwhelmingly in support of our students need to return to a normal scholastic schedule for the upcoming year, including extracurricular sports.

One of the most compelling justifications for a return to a normal scholastic schedule came directly from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), one of the most respected pediatric health organizations in the world:

*"The AAP **strongly advocates** that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school."*

*"The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation. **This, in turn, places children and adolescents at considerable risk of morbidity and, in some cases, mortality.**"*

“Beyond the educational impact and social impact of school closures, there has been substantial impact on food security and physical activity for children and families.”

“Schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being and provide our children and adolescents with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/speech and mental health therapy, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits.”

“Beyond supporting the educational development of children and adolescents, schools play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity.”

“The preponderance of evidence indicates that children and adolescents are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe disease resulting from SARS-CoV-2 infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection. Policies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within schools must be balanced with the known harms to children, adolescents, families, and the community by keeping children at home.”¹

While advocating for a return to school, the AAP also addressed the impact on educators and staff:

“The strain on teachers this year as they have been asked to teach differently while they support their own needs and those of their families has been significant, and they will be bringing that stress back to school as schools reopen. Resources such as Employee Assistance Programs and other means to provide support and mental health services should be established prior to reopening.”²

Given the foregoing, we must also be cognizant of our teachers and support staff and, to the extent practicable, adhere to all CDC recommendations regarding their safety. At a minimum, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be available to those who desire to use same.

Regarding structured sports, participation in competitive sports provides a social construct and interaction which is even more important during a time of uncertainty for our student athletes. It is widely recognized that physical activity, performed for the right amount of time and intensity can provide benefits to participants’ immune systems. Additionally, sports can provide an invaluable opportunity for young athletes to learn the concepts of teamwork, leadership, work ethic and integrity and an almost universal agreement regarding promoting physical fitness and mental wellness.

In addition, sports are major contributors to economic and social development.

For the foregoing reasons, I strongly urge BESE, LDOE, and LHSAA to continue to work toward safely returning students to the classroom and the sports field for the upcoming school year to benefit Louisiana’s students.

¹ COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry, American Academy of Pediatrics, June 25, 2020. ([Report available here](#))

² Id.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please let me know.

As usual, I truly appreciate the help. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ray Garofalo, Jr., Chairman
House Committee on Education

cc: Members, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Dr. Janet Pope, Executive Director, Louisiana School Boards Association
Mr. Michael Faulk, Executive Director, La. Association of School Superintendents

**The names of 62 legislators who agreed to sign
this letter are attached below and on the following 2 pages**

Clay Schexnayder
Speaker of the House
State Representative
District 81

Tanner Magee
Speaker Pro Temp
State Representative
District 53

Blake Miguez
Republican Delegation Chairman
State Representative
District 49

Mark Wright
Vice Chairman House Education
State Representative
District 77

Thomas Pressly
State Representative
District 6

Wayne McMahan
State Representative
District 10

Foy Gadberry
State Representative
District 15

Mike Johnson
State Representative
District 27

Larry Bagley
State Representative
District 7

Christopher Turner
State Representative
District 12

Gabe Firment
State Representative
District 22

Daryl Deshotel
State Representative
District 28

Raymond Crews
State Representative
District 8

Jack McFarland
State Representative
District 13

Rodney Schamerhorn
State Representative
District 24

Chuck Owen
State Representative
District 30

Dodie Horton
State Representative
District 9

Michael Echols
State Representative
District 14

Lance Harris
State Representative
District 25

Jonathan Goudeau
State Representative
District 31

Dewith Carrier
State Representative
District 32

Beryl Amedee
State Representative
District 51

Debbie Villio
State Representative
District 79

Glen Womack
State Senator
District 32

Les Farnum
State Representative
District 33

Jerome Zeringue
State Representative
District 52

Polly Thomas
State Representative
District 80

Barrow Peacock
State Senator
District 37

Stephen Dwight
State Representative
District 35

Bryan Fontenot
State Representative
District 55

Timothy Kerner
State Representative
District 84

Barry Milligan
State Senator
District 38

Phillip Tarver
State Representative
District 36

Greg Miller
State Representative
District 56

Nicky Mucsarello
State Representative
District 86

Troy Romero
State Representative
District 37

Valarie Hodges
State Representative
District 64

Kathy Edmonston
State Representative
District 88

Rhonda Butler
State Representative
District 38

Barry Ivey
State Representative
District 65

Richard Nelson
State Representative
District 89

Julie Emerson
State Representative
District 39

Rick Edmonds
State Representative
District 66

Joseph Stagni
State Representative
District 92

Phillip DeVillier
State Representative
District 41

Scott McKnight
State Representative
District 68

Sherman Mack
State Representative
District 95

John Stefanski
State Representative
District 42

Barbara Freiberg
State Representative
District 70

Mack Cormier
State Representative
District 105

Stuart Bishop
State Representative
District 43

Buddy Mincey
State Representative
District 71

Patrick McMath
State Senator
District 11

Michael Huval
State Representative
District 46

Bill Wheat
State Representative
District 73

Michael Fesi
State Senator
District 20

Beau Beaulieu
State Representative
District 48

Larry Frieman
State Representative
District 74

Bob Hensgens
State Senator
District 26

Vincent St. Blanc
State Representative
District 50

John Illg
State Representative
District 78

Mike Reese
State Senator
District 30