



United Teachers of New Orleans

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Contact:

Colette Tippy
ctippy@utno.org

Are New Orleans Schools Ready to Reopen?

Statement from the United Teachers of New Orleans in response to New Orleans Public Schools reopening Plan.

We all share a common desire to see New Orleans Schools reopen as soon as possible and to get back to a reality where students are safe to learn and socialize as normal. Unfortunately, the ongoing COVID-19 spread in Orleans Parish creates too high of a risk. The District's plan to resume in-person education for pre-k to 8th grade students on Monday seems rushed and ill-advised.

While we cannot expect to completely eliminate all risk, we must make health and safety a priority. New COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations are on the rise in Orleans Parish. While we have seen a marked decrease since the 7 day average of 266 on January 8th and 9th, our 7 day average cases have increased since the low of 118 on January 24th to 139 today. We may have seen a huge decrease in percent positive in the last week, but that is likely due to increased testing at Tulane, and not actually reflective of community spread in New Orleans. Furthermore we have not come close to reaching the guidelines set by the CDC about what constitutes the [highest risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in schools](#). While the CDC sets a threshold of 200 per 100,000 over 14 days (approximately 55 new cases per day for 14 days), Orleans parish is currently at 506.49 per 100,000 over 14 days.

Moreover, the District has not implemented necessary precautions to ensure the safest possible environment in our schools. They had planned to offer school-based testing for staff and students to help more immediately identify risks, but that is no longer available because of the inaccuracy of Curative tests. We do not yet know when increased testing

will be available. Additionally, most of the concerns outlined in our [January 1st letter](#) have yet to be addressed.

The levels of COVID in our community will create disruption to education as schools quarantine groups after exposure in schools. With the new variants of COVID circulating it is likely that transmission in schools will increase, particularly with classes of up to 30 students, where 6 feet of distancing is not possible. We must ensure that students and educators have some consistency in order to optimize their learning opportunities. Given the high levels of COVID-19 spread in our community, and the failure to implement increased safety protocols in schools, we do not believe that it is advisable to reopen school buildings at this time.