

December 3, 2020

# Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Bill of Rights for Springfield Students, Families, Educators and School Staff

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Springfield Education Association

Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals

Springfield No One Leaves

Western Mass Area Labor Federation

# Dear Springfield School Committee:

The 2020-21 school year is a school year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for students, families, educators and school staff alike. Despite the challenges, we could not be more proud that the Springfield School Committee and district leaders have remained committed to seeing that all students, families, educators and school staff have safe, effective and fulfilling schooling experiences through thoughtful and informed decision making . To encourage others to espouse this approach, we request that the Springfield School Committee adopt this Bill of Rights which outlines the precepts on which they have based their decisions and reaffirms their leadership role throughout the Commonwealth during the pandemic.

1. A meaningful voice in school-related plans and decisions at both the state and local levels. Students are best served when all stakeholders—families, students, educators, staff and community leaders—have a seat at the table, and when decisions are made through a collaborative, transparent process that incorporates all voices.

2. Plans and decisions that are based on the best available scientific and educational evidence, not politics. There is no room for gamesmanship or “gotcha” when lives and futures are at stake.

3. Schools that make health and safety the number-one priority. All possible precautions (masks, physical distancing, personal protective equipment, etc.) must be taken if attempting in-person learning, and nobody should be pressured into an unsafe environment. Special efforts must be made to protect those who are most vulnerable to the virus and its effects.

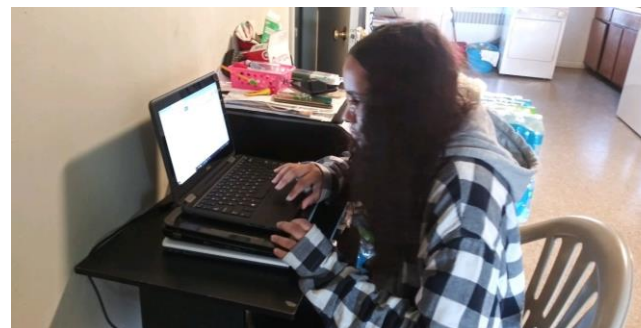


4. Schools that provide an emotionally safe, affirming and joyful learning experience. Stakeholders must work together to create emotionally safe and culturally responsive schools and classrooms that validate the identities and life experiences of all students and staff. School should be a joyful and enriching experience that students and staff alike look forward to.

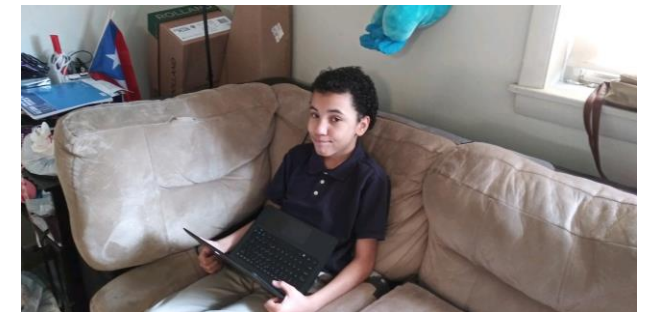
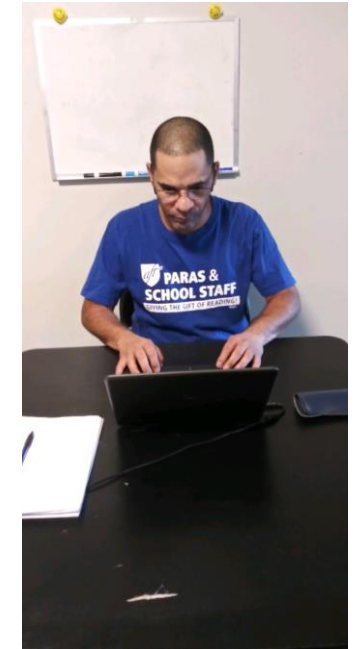


5. Schools where educators' expertise is trusted and respected. This applies especially to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment decisions, and to decisions around the appropriate use of technology (e.g., screen time). Teachers understand their students' needs and are best positioned to know what will engage students and advance their learning.

6. Schools that provide the tools and training to be successful. For students and families, this means access to functional computers, devices and Wi-Fi, as well as to training (in multiple languages) for parents and caregivers on how to use technology and support their children's learning at home. Educators and staff need functional technology, up-to-date materials and supplies, and relevant, high-quality professional development.



Hernandez  
Family  
Kissandra,  
Xyomara,  
Jordyn,  
Daniel and  
Daniel Jr.





7. Schools with reasonable class sizes and student caseloads that enable individualized support. We must implement the blueprint established by the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) to ensure that adequate resources and staffing are in place to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Paraprofessionals are especially critical in providing students with needed supports, and their work must be valued.



8. Schools that value and promote equity. Those with greater needs— e.g., homeless students, students in foster care, students with disabilities, English learners, struggling readers— generally require more support and assistance to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. State and local policies should give special consideration to these students.

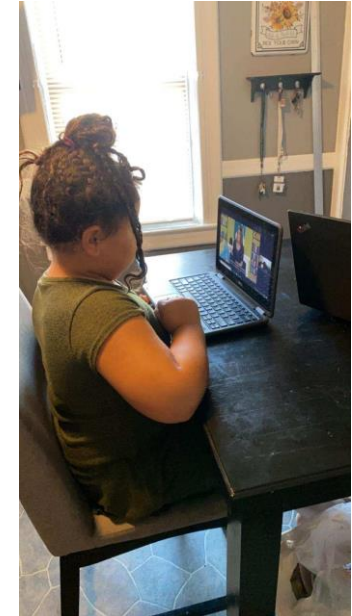
9. Schools that are committed to continuous improvement of remote-learning and hybrid-learning practices based on lived experiences. Schools are creating new learning systems on the fly as they respond to an unprecedented crisis. As educators and students learn what works best and what doesn't, stakeholders must work together to make the necessary refinements.



Michael Rodriguez  
Lincoln



Roy Rodriguez  
Impact Prep



Isabella Rose Rodriguez  
Lincoln

10. A social safety net that supports the basic needs of all Massachusetts residents. Too many students and families are struggling with challenges that go beyond the schoolhouse door: poverty, unemployment, food and housing insecurity, limited access to child care and more. Many educators and school staff are facing economic and child care hardships as well. For all students and staff to be successful, the state must commit to addressing these basic needs and promoting a just recovery through good policy and funding of critical supports.



We, the undersigned, endorse this Bill of Rights and urge its adoption in our community:

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Debora Husbands  
Irene Vershon  
Debora Bys  
Donna LaPierre  
Amy Meunier  
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