

## COVID-19 SAFE SCHOOLS BILL

### HB 2789 (Rep. Mussman and Sen. Belt)

#### SUPPORT

##### Rationale for Support

The Illinois Education Association has been working since the summer of 2020 to try to get state and local officials to enforce the guidelines put into place by the Illinois Department of Public Health regarding the opening of school buildings. The IEA believes the best place for students to be is in a classroom, as long as it's safe. However, in the event that safety protocols are not being followed in a school building, there needs to be an oversight and enforcement mechanism to assist in getting that school back into compliance.

At no point during the COVID pandemic has there been any oversight or enforcement guidelines for schools in Illinois. This has led to widespread angst, confusion and concern throughout the state, and in some instances has led to decisions being made that were dangerous for both students and staff.

##### Analysis

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has identified five areas that require mandated protocols for school districts:

- the use of appropriate personal protective equipment;
- increased cleaning and disinfecting;
- social distancing;
- no more than 50 individuals gathering in one space;
- and, symptom screenings and temperature checks.

Currently, there are no mandated statewide guidance currently exists. HB 2789 would require ISBE and the Illinois Department of Public Health to establish those mandated guidelines.

Without any sort of enforcement mechanism being instituted, there is nothing that requires administration or staff to adhere to any sort of safety guidelines. What that means is that if a student, staff member, or parent doesn't feel a school is following proper guidelines, they have no one to call and no one to enforce compliance. HB 2789 would allow for Regional Offices of Education to investigate complaints regarding safe in-person learning conditions and give ISBE the authority to subject school districts to penalties until they are in compliance with the state mandated guidelines. The legislation also sets up an appeals process for school districts that are found to be in non-compliance with the public health requirements.

HB 2789 is not intended to impact home schools. HB 2789 does not require school districts to prove they are fit to open. HB 2789 does not mandate the local health departments to inspect every school in the state. Inspections will only be conducted when a complaint is lodged. It is the position of the IEA that with these protocols in place, including an enforcement mechanism, school districts will have the guidance they have craved, therefore, resulting in fewer complaints, not more.