Gov. Pritzker, Lawmakers, Stakeholders Announce COVID-19 Sick Leave Initiative for Vaccinated School Staff

Administration Pledges to Work with IEA, IFT to Promote Member Vaccinations

CHICAGO – After productive conversations, Gov. Pritzker, the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois Federation of Teachers and other stakeholders announced that they have negotiated a compromise that will keep students and teachers safely in the classroom without penalizing vaccinated employees for taking COVID-required sick time.

“Vaccines are a vital tool in preventing the deadly effects of COVID-19, and those who take the steps to be fully vaccinated against this virus are doing their part to keep everyone safe,” said Governor Pritzker. “They deserve to be able to take the time they need to respond to the ongoing devastating impacts the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have on them and their families. This collaborative initiative will provide paid administrative leave for education employees who, despite doing all they can to keep themselves and their communities safe, continue to have their lives and livelihoods disrupted by COVID-19.”

“Keeping schools open and those inside them – and their families – safe has been our number one priority from the start of the pandemic,” said Kathi Griffin, president of the Illinois Education Association. “We want people to stay home when they’re sick, to be able to care for their children when their children need them the most, and to be paid when the circumstances that close their buildings are completely beyond their control. This bill protects school and university employees and all those they teach, drive to and from school, feed and care for in so many ways. Health care professionals and scientists have given us a path out of this pandemic and we should follow it.”

“The pandemic has been physically, emotionally, and economically challenging for us all, and certainly no less so for educators, school staff, and their families,” said Illinois Federation of Teachers President Dan Montgomery. “This legislation provides important relief and ensures that education personnel can afford to take time off if they or they families become ill with COVID.

“We applaud Governor Pritzker for his steady support of science and good public health and thank him for working with us to provide teachers, school staff and higher education professionals with critical resources that will help them keep kids safe and schools open,” added Montgomery.

This joint initiative provides the following protections for educators, school employees, and their families:
• Paid administrative leave for every employee of a public school district established under Article 10 or Article 34 of the School Code, public university, and public community college who is
  o fully vaccinated or has received the required doses to become fully vaccinated within five weeks of the effective date of the Act and who
  o is required, or whose child is required, to be excluded from school because of a positive COVID-19 test result or close contact with a person who had a confirmed case of COVID-19.
  o has been required by the school or school district policy to be excluded from school district property due to COVID-19 symptoms.

• Restoration of sick leave for every employee of a public school district, public university, and public community college who
  o is fully vaccinated or has received the required doses to become fully vaccinated within five weeks of the effective date of the Act, and
  o who has previously used their sick time because they or their child were required to be excluded from school because of a positive COVID-19 test result or close contact with a person who had a confirmed case of COVID-19.
  o has been required by the school or school district policy to be excluded from school district property due to COVID-19 symptoms.

• Maintains wage protections in HB2778 for all hourly school employees, including but not limited to, custodial, transportation, food service providers, classroom assistants, or administrative staff. This protection applies for the entire 2021-22 school year, including any days that a school has already closed or switched to e-learning which caused the paraprofessional to go without pay or take their own earned paid time off.

As a result of this collaboration, the Governor is vetoing House Bill 2778.

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