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February 22, 2021

Governor Andrew Cuomo, Chair
Governor Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 N. Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Governor Cuomo and Governor Hutchinson:

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic continues to exacerbate the challenges facing K-12 public schools across the country. Throughout this crisis, educators have worked to ensure that students have access to the opportunity to learn – and there is nowhere that educators would rather be than in-person, working with and supporting students. Like you, we want to be sure that students, families and educators are able to trust that schools are the safest place in the community. In December, the NEA called for educators – including teachers and all staff working in schools – to receive priority in the vaccination process – we reiterated that call last month, and do so again today, to help facilitate a safe and equitable return to in-person learning. To date, several states have placed educators in a high-priority group, and we greatly appreciate both the effort and acknowledgement that ensuring educators are vaccinated is critical to the mitigation strategies laid out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As leader of the National Governors Association, we urge you to urge all of your members to prioritize educators in your state’s COVID-19 vaccination plan.

Recently, the CDC published revised guidance regarding COVID mitigation strategies and noted in their guidance that educators should be given high priority in early phases of vaccination distribution, in part due to their work being critical to the continued functioning of society and the potential occupational risk of exposure. Based on this latest guidance, we know that with the proper mitigation practices consistently in place, schools can be safe for in-person learning.

While about half of the states have placed educators in the priority queue for vaccination, there’s still a great opportunity to build on that good work of prioritizing educators for vaccinations, to ensure a safe and healthy return to in-person instruction. In a recent NEA survey of educators, a strong majority (70%) indicate that being vaccinated will make them feel safer in returning to in-person instruction and that they would like to be vaccinated before returning to the classroom.

February 22, 2021
Governor Andrew Cuomo, Chair
Governor Asa Hutchinson, Vice Chair
Page 2

Almost that same number of educators (68%) indicate that they face difficulty in scheduling a vaccination – in part due to state prioritization guidelines. We can address the issue of difficulty in access by prioritizing educators for vaccination – which will also go a long way in combating the fear many educators have for their safety and the safety of their own families upon returning to in-person learning. We must work together to ensure accurate information and access reaches educators regarding the vaccine. Separately, in order to build such trust among Black, Brown, and Indigenous educators – many of whom are hesitant to become vaccinated – we have to confront this issue and turn it around.

Like you, we want educators to be back in school buildings, with our students – but we must do so safely, and the only way to do that is to fully implement the strategies identified by the CDC, including prioritizing educators for vaccination. We know we can count on you to take steps to ensure that students and educators are a high priority in every state. We thank the Governors who have done so thus far and look forward to working with all Governors in partnership with our state affiliates to get educators vaccinated for a safe, healthy return to in-person learning.

Respectfully,



Becky Pringle
NEA President



Kim Anderson
NEA Executive Director