

# Association of School Boards: John H. Ashley statement on Assembly GOP COVID-19 legislation

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We want to recognize Speaker Robin Vos and the Assembly Republican caucus for proposing a legislative package to address the needs of the state in dealing with the ongoing public health pandemic.

After months of inactivity, this movement toward advancing concrete proposals is encouraging. Along with Gov. Tony Evers' proposal, there are now two plans for consideration to look for items that can receive bipartisan agreement.

There are a number of K-12 education provisions included in the Republican package that will be helpful to school boards. The WASB is supportive of efforts to help provide students with personal computing devices and re-creating a grant program for this purpose. We are also supportive of the provision intended to protect schools from civil liability in regard to COVID-19-related lawsuits.

That being said, the WASB is very concerned about a number of provisions that would pre-empt local school board decision-making and penalize districts for decisions made in the interest of public safety.

The WASB opposes proposals to require staff to be physically present in buildings, require a two-thirds majority vote on the school board to provide instruction virtually and financially penalize districts that provide instruction virtually.

We strongly encourage further dialogue between state legislators and their local school boards and/or the WASB to learn more about why school boards have made the decisions they have made in response to the pandemic. School board members

have made extraordinary efforts to survey parents and gauge community sentiment before making difficult decisions about curriculum, athletics, transportation, food service and much more. School boards must take into account local health department guidance and respond to staff shortages caused by isolation or quarantine orders among other factors.

Every school board in the state wants students back in school safely as soon as possible. But the WASB cannot support a state-mandated approach that imposes arbitrary deadlines and limits the ability for local school boards to respond to local circumstances. The locally elected school board is the authority closest to what is happening in each school district and each community, and they are accountable to local electors. While not everyone in the community will agree with a board's decisions, the school board remains the best place for difficult and timely decisions to be made.