

MTEA: Wisconsin teachers' unions defend local health departments' authority and call for even stronger action

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WISCONSIN – Yesterday, Wisconsin teachers' unions, led by Madison Teachers Inc., and joined by the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, Racine Educators United, Kenosha Education Association, Green Bay Education Association, and the Wisconsin Education Association Council filed an amicus brief to defend against reckless legal attacks on the longstanding authority of local Health Departments to protect the public health of their residents. The Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards joined the brief. As the pandemic worsens and the crisis deepens, it is absolutely necessary and urgent for public health officials to act to slow the community spread of COVID-19, especially when it comes to schools and our children.

Right now, a wave of new Coronavirus cases is sweeping across the United States and Upper Midwest. In Wisconsin, GOP lawmakers and their supporters continue to obstruct efforts by Governor Evers, local elected officials, and local health departments to slow the spread of the pandemic and ensure that students, families and school staff remain safe and out of harm's way. At the same time, the disparate rate of COVID-19 infection, severe illness, and death among people of color and working communities further spotlights the structural racism and economic inequality that exists in our society. Without a coordinated response, and continued leadership by all public officials, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) will remain at greater risk of falling victim to this health crisis. [More than 1 million children in the U.S.](#) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, according to a new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association.

While defending local health departments' authority in the Wisconsin Supreme Court, Teachers' Unions are also calling for immediate action from public health officials:

- The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) called on the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) to close all schools as the positivity rate in Milwaukee continued to climb rapidly. Despite the precipitous rise in Milwaukee, MHD has failed to act. [MTEA released a public petition](#) calling on MHD and Mayor Barrett to follow the lead of the City of Racine Public Health Department to close schools as Thanksgiving nears.
- The Kenosha Education Association (KEA), filed a class action grievance detailing the lack of adequate safety protocols and enforcement across KUSD based on over 300 reported violations and concerns. KEA has requested specific remedies to ensure the safety of educators and students. KEA also filed an official complaint with the Kenosha County Health Department (KCHD) in October, asking that they investigate the current health and safety conditions of school buildings. KUSD recently issued a statement that flagrantly ignores the recommendations of KCHD to close schools until January. The KUSD School Board will meet about their Return 2020 Plan tonight, November 17 at 7:00pm. KEA members will testify in favor of KCHD's recommended school closure.
- The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) issued [a letter to the state Department of Health Services demanding the agency impose gating requirements for schools to use in making decisions about whether to hold classes virtually or in-person](#).

"Our students, our families, our union members, and all Wisconsinites deserve strong leadership that puts the public good first," said Andy Waity, President of Madison Teachers, Inc. "We are tired of political maneuvering and weak leadership. We need strong, immediate action to save lives. This crisis calls for coordinated action and solidarity instead of individualistic, selfish behavior. We must do better."