South Carolina Chapter 

**The South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics works toward establishing a safe environment for children and is an advocate for children's needs. In that role we have carefully considered the available scientific evidence about the coronavirus pandemic. The following recommendations for continued education during these stressful times are based upon this information as well as our expertise taking care of our patients.**

Teachers and staff need to feel safe when teaching our children. Schools will need to follow guidance from public health officials and adhere to health monitoring and cleaning/disinfecting protocols, have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) for teachers, staff and students, implement new procedures for busing and transporting students to school, alter before- and after-school child care and enrichment programs, ensure that students competing in athletics and other activities are safe, make physical plant modifications, adjust staffing schedules, and put protocols in place for how a school responds when a student or teacher tests positive for COVID-19.

Science should drive decision-making on safely reopening schools. Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics. Local school leaders, public health experts, educators and parents must be at the center of decisions about how and when to reopen schools, taking into account the spread of COVID-19 in their communities and the capacities of school districts to adapt safety protocols to make in-person learning safe and feasible.

**A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate for return to school decisions.**

The pandemic has reminded so many what we have long understood: that educators are invaluable in children’s lives and that attending school in person offers children a wide array of health and educational benefits. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation.

The Academy carefully weighed the available evidence and determined that our shared goal should be to have students physically present in school in the fall. Even though this will not be easy, we strongly advocate that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with this goal in mind. This should happen with careful measures to keep students, teachers, and staff safe, and with flexibility to adapt as needed to the community’s prevalence of COVID-19.

**The goal should be to have students physically present in school as long as safety measures for students and staff can be met.**

Reopening schools in a way that maximizes safety, learning, and the well-being of children, teachers, and staff will clearly require substantial new investments in our schools and campuses. We call on our state leaders to provide the resources needed to ensure that inadequate funding does not stand in the way of safely educating and caring for children in our schools. Not approving plans from schools that do not have the capacity to safely open in person full time would be a misguided approach, putting schools in an impossible position that would threaten the health of students and teachers.

**COVID-19 policies are intended to reduce risk, but they will not eliminate it entirely.**We encourage pediatricians, families, and schools to partner together to identify and develop accommodations, when needed, for children with special needs or other vulnerabilities.

**It is up to all of us to help reduce transmission rates in our communities and prepare for a safe return to schools for teachers, staff, and students. The SC AAP asks all citizens of our state to take part in efforts to reopen schools safely by wearing face coverings whenever interacting with others and practicing caution outside the home, even with close family and friends. Prioritize children’s education over visits to bars and indoor restaurants.**