



United States Senate Committee on
**Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs**
U.S. Senator Gary Peters | Ranking Member

Ranking Member Gary Peters' Plan for Safely Returning to School

As communities begin considering steps to return to school in the fall, our top priority must be ensuring that students can continue their education and development while we protect the health and safety of students, teachers, staff and their families. The federal government must work together to provide comprehensive support for students, staff, and school systems. Schools and communities must have the funding, guidance and other resources to make informed decisions based on their unique, local circumstances – including determining when children can safely go back to school in-person, securing access to technology for distance learning, and supporting our teachers and school staff.

1. Provide Schools with Resources, Supplies and Guidelines to Combat COVID-19

The federal government must ensure schools can access key resources to keep staff and students safe.

- **Access to Testing:** Access to COVID-19 testing is critical to schools functioning safely. FEMA and HHS must guarantee that every symptomatic or exposed student or staff member will have access to a quick, reliable test with prompt results. I released a [testing plan](#) in March that would help expand testing access, but the Administration has allowed testing problems to persist in communities nationwide. Shortages of testing supplies, processing backlogs, and surges of infections are overwhelming testing sites. These issues must be addressed before schools reopen so all students and staff can be tested as needed.
- **Provide Masks, Screening Equipment, and Staffing Support:** Facemasks have been proven to limit community transmission, and they are essential for school safety. FEMA must provide sufficient face masks to all students and staff, as appropriate, and ensure that schools have the resources necessary to screen individuals for symptoms, such as thermometers, isolation equipment, and PPE for staff. Congress must also support the hiring of school nurses to address COVID-19 and other illnesses, through legislation such as the [NURSE Act](#), which I support.
- **Guidance and Training to Limit Spread:** The CDC must provide evidence-based guidance on best practices for schools to institute effective infection control measures in classrooms, at recess, and in transit to and from school, including on school buses. Staff must be given access to appropriate training and resources to help keep our children safe, including on how social distancing should be implemented, how to conduct classroom rotations, and other best practices for infection control.

2. Empower Quality Educational Opportunities, Regardless of Location

The federal government must address shortcomings to distance learning, which will likely continue to be a component or contingency option for school reopening plans.

- **Combat Broadband Access Issues:** 18% of students do not have access to broadband internet, and without it, distance learning is nearly impossible. Congress should invest in broadband infrastructure to promote internet access for students in Michigan and nationwide, which I have [urged](#) Congressional leadership to consider for the next relief package.
- **Provide Devices for Students:** 17% of all students nationwide do not have access to a computer at home. Students in families without a computer have less access to educational materials from home. Congress must appropriate funds to help provide devices to students that do not have them so they are able to fully engage in distance learning.
- **Address Unique Student Needs:** Congress should also consider the needs of students that are disproportionately affected by deviations from standard in-person schooling routines, such as students with disabilities or families struggling with food insecurity, in future relief packages.
- **Secure School Data Online:** Schools have increasingly become targets of cyber-attacks, which place information systems and sensitive records at risk. My [K-12 Cybersecurity Act](#) would provide the resources and information needed to detect and mitigate cyber vulnerabilities as online education grows.

3. Support School Staff in Reopening Process:

Teachers and school staff face substantial safety risks that must be addressed as reopening plans are made.

- **Provide Premium Pay:** School staff must be compensated for performing essential work during the pandemic. My [HEROES Fund](#) proposal would provide premium pay to these frontline workers.
- **Account for Child Care Needs:** Employers need to accommodate staff with children who face challenges finding child care in the pandemic or those who may need to take leave to care for children or quarantine because of COVID-19. Congress must pass the [Child Care is Essential Act](#), which I cosponsored, to provide aid to childcare facilities to support parents returning to work.
- **Appropriate Relief Funds to Support Budgets:** States and school districts are facing dire budget cuts because of a lack of tax revenue and increased emergency response costs due to COVID-19. Congress must approve relief funds to support state and local budgets and ensure that budget cuts do not prevent schools from safely reopening.