

Reopening America’s Schools Amid COVID 19: Where the Presidential Candidates Stand

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) believes that high-quality public education is the foundation of a democratic society and the key to improving economic prosperity and gender equality. Our advocacy for equitable access to education is more important now than ever as the coronavirus poses immense challenges for our schools, forcing difficult choices about how educators will teach and how students will learn. We are at risk of widening the already unacceptable achievement gap that disproportionately affects low-income children and students from communities of color.

The Facts: A Snapshot of School Districts and their Reopening Plans¹

	In Person	Hybrid	Remote	Total
Districts	220	248	438	888
Students	2,557,674	3,758,040	13,381,100	19,696,814

The urgency to reopen schools safely has elicited wildly different responses at the federal, state, and local levels. The CARES Act, passed in March 2020, provided \$13.5 billion to K-12 schools with an additional \$3 billion to the Governor’s Education Relief Fund, which governors can use at their discretion to provide emergency support grants to K-12 schools, colleges and child care/early education providers. The HEROES Act, which would provide an additional \$59 billion in funds to K-12 schools passed the House of Representatives in May 2020 but has not been brought to the Senate floor for a vote.² The 2020 Presidential candidates have also weighed in with different paths to reopening.

The 2020 Presidential Candidates and School Reopening

Donald Trump (R) ³	Joe Biden (D) ⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed the CARES Act into law on March 27, 2020⁵ • Proposed withholding federal aid for schools that do not physically reopen⁶ • Called for Congress to pass \$70 billion for K-12 schools – to provide financial assistance and incentives to help schools implement safety measures in their resumption of in-person classes • Supported the School Choice Now Act, which includes Education Freedom Scholarships, and would divert federal aid from public K-12 schools via vouchers to private schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsed the HEROES Act • Called for national, objective criteria to empower state, tribal and local officials in deciding if and how reopening can be managed safely • Called for emergency funding for public schools and child care providers, especially Title I schools • Proposed mobilizing a large-scale effort to develop, adopt, and share the latest tools and best practices to ensure high-quality learning • Recommended closing the COVID-19 educational equity gap by delivering high-quality learning with a special emphasis on students with disabilities, English-language learners, and students who do not have access to technology or broadband

¹ Data as of 9/11/20 <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/school-districts-reopening-plans-a-snapshot.html>

² <https://www.future-ed.org/what-congressional-covid-funding-means-for-k-12-schools/>

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-supporting-americas-students-families-encouraging-safe-reopening-americas-schools/>

⁴ <https://joebiden.com/school-reopening/>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-h-r-748-cares-act/>

⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/07/29/school-reopening-plans-linked-to-politics-rather-than-public-health/>