

FIGHT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND MAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

- WHEREAS:** The COVID-19 Pandemic has brought an international healthcare emergency to Michigan; and
- WHEREAS:** The spread of COVID-19 has caused hospitals in parts of the state – most significantly in Detroit and southeastern Michigan – to become overburdened with critically ill patients. Many of these hospitals face staffing shortages due to staff taking ill from COVID-19. Staff at these hospitals have also faced shortages of personal protective equipment; and
- WHEREAS:** The pandemic has had a particularly devastating impact on people of color and people living in poverty; and
- WHEREAS:** The COVID-19 Pandemic has prompted Governor Whitmer to suspend in-person instruction statewide for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year; and
- WHEREAS:** The right to a free public education is enshrined in the Michigan Constitution; and
- WHEREAS:** Many educational technology companies have viewed the COVID-19 pandemic as a fortuitous marketing opportunity for themselves and their efforts to further privatize public education. They have consequently made their software available in a broad campaign of “free trials;” and
- WHEREAS:** Many Michigan students have insufficient or no internet access at home to engage in web-mediated activities and interactions with their classmates and teachers; and
- WHEREAS:** Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has issued guidance on the CARES Act which would divert much needed funding from public schools; and
- WHEREAS:** Food insecurity is a widespread problem in Michigan, with one in six children experiencing hunger. Nearly 750,000 students, or about half all students in Michigan receive at least one free or reduced meal at school every day. This abhorrent lack of food security has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Schools, educators, and support staff responded to school closure with immediate ability to distribute food to children and families in need; and
- WHEREAS:** Many families already struggled financially prior to this crisis, and even more families are now experiencing additional financial hardship due to widespread joblessness as businesses are closed to prevent further spread of COVID-19; and
- WHEREAS:** There are basic needs to be met to protect and sustain life, many workers deemed essential to critical infrastructure must report to work and risk exposure to the virus. As sectors of the economy reopen, more workers will risk exposure to the virus in the workplace. However, maintaining healthy workplaces and reducing the risk of virus transmission requires investment by employers and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration is currently slow to investigate complaints and conduct random spot checks of workplaces; and
- WHEREAS:** This pandemic is projected to be an ongoing and recurring challenge to healthcare, public education, and everyday life for many months to come; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls on the US Department of Education to rescind the guidance that is counter to the original congressional intent and plain reading of the law; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls for every level of federal, state, county, and municipal government to base COVID-19 pandemic response policies on the best available science; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls for a rapid expansion of public health funding in the state; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls on the state to provide every piece of personal protective equipment that frontline healthcare workers, educators and school support personnel, and other essential workers need, and that protective equipment also be provided to the entire population to use for conducting essential business outside of the home. Public health funds should be allocated for state-funded production and distribution of personal protective equipment; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls on the state to develop guidelines for the safe reopening of our economy, our schools, and our institutions of higher education and to only reopen when it is safe to do so. AFT Michigan will present to the Governor, the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity and members of the Michigan Legislature a copy of the AFT Report “A Plan To Safely Reopen America’s Schools and Communities;” and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls on the federal government to fully fund the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to inspect and ensure workplaces are safe; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls for immediate and ongoing economic relief for laid-off and furloughed workers and for small business owners throughout the duration of the COVID-19 crisis; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls for schools to remain closed until mass testing confirms that transmission of COVID-19 has been brought under control; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan further calls for schools to remain closed until COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, isolation options, and treatment are freely available to everyone in Michigan; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls for the state to provide internet access and computers for students to access educational resources from their homes until the crisis is resolved. Where possible, municipalities should receive funding to provide WiFi as a public utility. AFT Michigan supports web access as a means for students to interact with teachers and with each other throughout this crisis, not as a means for test-preparation drills and practice, and not as a means for educational technology companies to continue their efforts to privatize public education or permanently move in-person education online; and **NOW THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY**
- RESOLVED:** AFT Michigan calls on the Michigan Legislature to repeal Section 7 Article IX of the Michigan Constitution and enact a graduated income tax to ensure wealthy individuals and corporations pay their fair share to provide the full funding of early childhood, K-12,

and higher education, provide for repairs to transportation and water infrastructure, and provide for the funding necessary to fully respond to the crisis presented by COVID-19 to protect the lives and livelihoods of the people of Michigan.

Submitted by Benjamin Royal, Detroit Federation of Teachers Local 231
Revised and recommended for approval by the Legislation & Resolutions Committee
Approved by the 76th AFT Michigan Convention

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