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STATEMENT

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**Opening Statement of Rep. Rick Allen (R-GA), Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education:  
“Underfunded & Unprepared: Examining How to Overcome Obstacles to Safely  
Reopen Public Schools”  
July 23, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Reopening America's schools has dominated family conversations around the country the last few weeks. The good news is, science is on our side and federal agencies, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and state agencies, like the Georgia Department of Public Health, have provided detailed reports on how we can reopen schools safely. I hope during today's hearing, we can put political finger pointing aside, and put our children's interests first while we discuss, not *if*, but *how* we can safely reopen schools this fall.

I know both my Democrat and Republican colleagues agree that students are being harmed by the physical closure of schools, and that we need to provide the option of in-person instruction. As we gear up for a new school year this fall, this question of how to reopen our nation's schools safely needs to be a top priority for this Committee.

This past spring more than 55 million students were affected by COVID-19-related school closures. That number accounts for approximately 97 percent of students nationwide. The result? Well, the numbers speak for themselves.

The Collaborative for Student Growth projected that some students could experience as much as a 50 percent reduction in typical learning gains as a result of school closures. Another analysis conducted by McKinsey and Company, a consulting group, found that when all the impacts of COVID-19 are taken into account, the average student could fall seven months behind academically.

As Leader McCarthy argued, we cannot afford to let a generation miss out on being taught. President Trump also recognizes the vital importance of safety and reopening America's schools.

Sadly, learning loss isn't the only challenge students face due to school closures. This pandemic and subsequent school closures have drastically reduced interactions between vulnerable children and trusted adults while exacerbating conditions that contribute to child abuse and neglect such as financial strain and social isolation. School closures diminish educators' abilities to serve these vulnerable students.

Additionally, for some children, school is the only place where they receive nutritious meals on a consistent basis. According to the Department of Agriculture, more than 30 million children in the U.S. count on schools for free or low-cost meals, so when schools and child care centers close, children miss out on essential food services.

Let's not forget the economic downside of keeping schools closed. If children can't attend school, parents can't return to work. In fact, the Brookings Institution argues 'the world could lose as much as \$10 trillion over the coming generation as a result of school closures today.' School closures also disproportionately impact the economic well-being of lower-income and single parent households. While families with multiple workers may be able to have one working adult scale back their hours or quit their job to take on caregiving duties full time, this is unlikely to be feasible for all families, especially those already struggling financially during the economic downturn.

In May, the CDC released guidance on reopening schools that includes ways in which schools can help protect students, teachers, administrators, and staff.

These guidelines recognize that each school is unique and there will be no one-size-fits-all solution to reopening. Given that schools vary in their location, size, and structure, the CDC recommends that school officials should determine, in collaboration with state and local health officials, whether and how to implement CDC guidance.

Moreover, the American Academy of Pediatrics also released guidance for schools. They strongly advocated 'that all policy considerations for the coming

school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.'

What do educators think? The American Federation of Teachers found that 76 percent of educators surveyed would be comfortable returning if certain health and safety conditions were met at their school. This includes daily cleaning and sanitizing of school facilities, additional protections for at-risk students and staff, and availability of protective equipment. These are steps we can and should take to safely reopen our schools.

That is why this morning I introduced the *Educational Flexibility for Families Act*, legislation that requires K-12 schools to provide an option for students to safely attend in-person classes for the upcoming school year in order to be eligible for any federal assistance. My bill would ensure that the option for in-person learning is on the table and available for families around the country who want their children to safely return to the classroom this fall. I am proud of the education leaders in my district who are committed to providing families the flexibility they need this school year – whether it's in the classroom, distance learning, homeschooling or a hybrid model.

The bottom line is, schools must be prepared to provide every student effective instruction this fall. The health and future of our nation's students depends on it. I thank our witnesses for testifying on this important topic today, and I look forward to hearing from them about the measures we can take to safely reopen America's classrooms this fall."

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