

Tuesday, September 29, 2020 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Map changes go too far, WVEA seeks injunction

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The following statement is from WVEA President Dale Lee.

“In the next few days our attorneys will be filing an injunction in Kanawha County Circuit Court challenging the continued changes made to the map and whether it has compromised the safety of the students and employees in our public schools.

Our members have watched the constant manipulation of the map. As each rendition failed to provide the desired results sought by our state leaders, additional changes were made. The map manipulation has gone on long enough. Citizens and educators have lost confidence and trust that the changes made to the map are in the interest of safety and public health.

The only way to restore confidence in the process and ensure safety in our public schools is to adopt a new system from independent experts recognized in the field of infectious diseases and public health, such as the original color-coded map from Harvard.

The latest changes to the map simply go too far and the illusion of a ‘green map’ does not mean it is safe to return to in-person learning in many of our counties.

We know how important it is for students to be back in classrooms working with their teachers. No one wants in-person education more than our members, but they no longer feel safety is the top priority of our state government’s leadership.

We have educators all over the state who have lost confidence in the governor and his statements regarding his desire to keep them safe.

Listening to the comments from the governor and his health advisors, the focus has clearly been on getting teams back on the playing field and getting students in school. They forget that in many classrooms and buses across our state it is impossible to practice appropriate social distancing and enforce mask wearing. PPEs in many districts are limited and school employees are already performing many tasks that go far above and beyond their jobs.

If a county was too dangerous to have in-person class with 50 COVID cases and they now have 60 cases, it is still unsafe regardless of the percentages and all the tweaks made to the map.

Our teaching population is older and over 2/3 of our members stated that either they or someone in their immediate household have conditions that put them at risk. Yet, we expect them to go to work in conditions that are unsafe and where social distancing cannot be exercised.

Even with the mask requirement and the space to social distance, our governor and state board do not allow people into their meetings or press conferences. And many other government agencies are still not back to regular office hours or are working split shifts. Why are teachers and students different when it comes to their safety?

Additionally, we take offense to the governor stating that the unions agree with these changes and are okay with a 5% positivity rate. Nothing could be further from the truth. WVEA has not been consulted about the map changes or had any conversations with the governor or his staff prior to the changes being made.

WVEA has never stated that 5% is an acceptable rate of infection to allow for in-person education. We defer to the national health experts who have dealt with global health outbreaks for decades for their recommendations and advice.

Our injunction seeks to return the state’s color-coded map to reflect the intent of those national experts regarding the health and safety of our students and employees.”