



STATE OF GEORGIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
ATLANTA 30334-0090

Brian P. Kemp  
GOVERNOR

February 4, 2021

Atlanta Board of Education  
130 Trinity Ave. SW  
Atlanta, GA 30303

To the members of the Atlanta Board of Education:

Recent media reports have indicated that the Atlanta Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution requesting that I move all educators and district staff into the current 1a+ COVID-19 vaccination criteria.

I have great respect and appreciation for the work all of you do on a daily basis. As I said in my State of the State address last month, our educators and school staff are among the heroes of this pandemic. That is why my budget proposal includes over \$647 million in restored funding for schools, building on the strong commitment I have upheld throughout my two years as your 83rd governor to put Georgia's teachers, students, and parents first.

As you well know, that commitment has included the largest teacher pay raise in state history of \$3,000, boosted mental health funding through the popular APEX program, locally-controlled school security grants, drastically reduced high-stakes testing, and a \$1,000 supplement for all school staff this year. And just this week, my administration rolled out legislation to strengthen our teacher pipeline by recruiting, mentoring, and training the best and the brightest to lead our classrooms.

In addition to action, I have made it a priority to listen to educators, board members, superintendents, and parents. I meet regularly with superintendents from across the state, I have attended multiple teacher listening sessions, and there have been few GSSA, GSBA, PAGE, GAE, and GAEL conferences or Days at the Capitol I have not participated in.

In response to your resolution: I agree. If the state were receiving adequate supply of the COVID-19 vaccines, Dr. Toomey and I would quickly move to expand the current

vaccination criteria. As my record as governor bears out, I absolutely value our educators and school staff, and would like nothing more than to vaccinate all of them tomorrow. However, as many of you are aware, this pandemic has presented one tough decision after another. That reality is why people elect leaders like you and I – to make the hard choices and to tell people the truth, even when it may be difficult to hear.

The truth is that our current vaccine supply is not enough to expand the 1A+ vaccination criteria. We have over 2 million Georgians eligible to get the vaccine today, including over 1.3 million seniors. While we have made extraordinary progress – administering over 1 million doses to over 800,000 Georgians and 500,000 seniors – we have a long, tough journey ahead of us.

To prioritize vaccination of teachers and school staff under the age of 65 would mean adding an additional 450,000 Georgians to the rolls of those currently eligible. Many public health districts in the metro-Atlanta area have already had to pause additional first-dose appointments – not because of a lack of demand, but due to a severe lack of vaccine supplied to our state from the federal government. Elderly Georgians, who are most at risk of severe illness or death, have struggled to find appointments with websites down and phone lines busy. Unfortunately, implementing your resolution would make that problem even worse.

In addition to a supply issue, there is also well-established science and public health data that strongly supports in-person learning. As recently as this week, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky stated, “Vaccination of teachers is not a prerequisite for safe reopening of schools.” Further research by the CDC has shown COVID-19 transmission in schools is lower than the surrounding community and that spread among students is low. This scientific research contrasts with the social, emotional, and mental health crisis facing parents and students across the country – and here in Georgia – that is a direct result of schools being closed.

Given that the state has partnered with local school districts to provide over 8 million masks, APS has implemented a mask mandate on campuses and received over \$112 million in CARES Act funds from the federal government, it is my belief that the Atlanta School Board can move forward – safely – with in-person learning as we await more vaccine supply. Dozens of school districts across our state have done so since last fall before any vaccine was first available to Georgians.

I will also point out that once the vaccine is available to educators and school staff, they will not all be vaccinated at the same time. That process, done safely and efficiently, may take weeks. Our students cannot wait to go back to school. They have waited long enough.

I campaigned – and have governed – as a local control governor. I did not mandate school re-openings, nor did I criticize the tough decisions you all had to make last spring, summer, and fall. Dr. Toomey and I chose to work with you – even when we disagreed – because the challenges we face are truly unprecedented, everyone is doing the best they can with what they have, and our students and parents expect all of us to work together.

As Dr. Toomey and I have said on multiple occasions: as soon as we can expand the current vaccination criteria to include educators and school staff, we absolutely will. I believe we should do so because these hardworking Georgians are undoubtedly essential to the health, well-being, and future prosperity of our state.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the students, parents, and families you serve every day. Please do not hesitate to reach out directly to my office if you would like to discuss these important issues further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. P. Kemp". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Brian P. Kemp  
Governor