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**Akron Education
Association**

Press Release

Ohio's Largest Teacher Unions to Governor: Life-Saving Vaccine Is Not a Bargaining Chip

Akron, OH, January 21, 2021: Patricia Shipe, President of the Akron Education Association (AEA) representing almost 2400 members, has released the following joint labor statement;

COLUMBUS OH — Governor DeWine announced this week that 96% of public school districts have signed a form committing to a return to in-person learning by March 1st, even though the timeline for vaccine distribution means that no educators and staff will be fully vaccinated by that date. The Governor didn't mention that this commitment form was presented as a prerequisite for educators and school staff to receive vaccines during Phase 1B.

The following joint statement is signed by: Patricia Shipe, President of **Akron Education Association** (Independent union); Paul Palomba, President of **Canton Professional Educators' Association** (OEA); Julie Sellers, President of **Cincinnati Federation of Teachers** (OFT); Shari Obrenski, President of **Cleveland Teachers Union** (OFT); John Coneglio, President of **Columbus Education Association** (OEA); David Romick, President of **Dayton Education Association** (OEA); Kevin Dalton, President of **Toledo Federation of Teachers** (OFT); and Larry Ellis, President of **Youngstown Education Association**.

"Our school districts include some of the communities in Ohio that have been hit hardest by the deadly effects of COVID-19. Our members, our students and their families, and our cities will face dire consequences if schools are pressured to reopen before it is safe to do so.

We are disappointed that Governor DeWine has decided to use the distribution of a life-saving vaccine as a bargaining chip, holding this precious commodity hostage while pitting parents, administrators, teachers, other school workers, and students against each other. While we expect there will be no consequences for schools that fail to meet this commitment, that doesn't mean the Governor isn't harming communities with this action. Parents across the state now have unrealistic expectations for a March 1 reopening that simply will not be possible in many school districts. In some districts, these expectations are already pushing superintendents to announce and plan for reopening before it is safe.

No one wants a safe reopening of schools more than the educators and staff who have dedicated their careers to public education. We miss our students and we know that remote education can never fully replace the experience of in-person learning. However, we should not rush to reopen before it is safe, especially when adding mere weeks beyond March 1 could allow for full vaccinations of school employees. Luckily, schools don't open up just because a Superintendent signs a letter; schools open up when teachers, staff, and parents collectively decide it is safe to do so.

Governor DeWine should make good on his pledge to prioritize pre-K to 12 school employees, and he should do so without any coerced preconditions. School districts should plan for safe reopenings based on objective public health criteria, which would include, but not be limited to, vaccine availability for educators and staff. Most importantly, Governor DeWine needs to stop playing games with the health and lives of our school communities."