



The National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP) is a coalition representing more than one million Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP). SISP professionals include school counselors, school nurses, psychologists, school psychologists, social workers and school social workers; occupational therapists, physical therapists; art, dance/movement, music therapists, and speech-language pathologists and audiologists. In addition, the major national organizations representing general and special education teachers and administrators are part of the coalition. SISP provide direct supports to students and provide consultation to teachers, families, administrators, and community partners to help ensure all students thrive.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we firmly believe that the to return to in-person instruction in our nation's schools must be guided by reliable local public health data, and it must consider the needs of students, families, and staff. Demands from government officials, that call for the full-scale reopening of schools for in-person instruction and threaten the withholding of funds without consideration for local conditions and capacity undermines the trust that communities have placed in public schools throughout our history. Emergency federal education funding must be provided to state and local education agencies and school regardless of how they plan to offer instruction. To require in-person instruction in exchange for federal assistance is dangerous and irresponsible. These funds are critical to ensure the above conditions can be met and that schools will be able to offer high quality instruction AND protect the safety of students and staff.

The decision to return to in-person instruction must be a local decision, made with broad stakeholder input to include families, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, school administrators, public health officials, and other relevant stakeholders. If we are serious about returning to in-person instruction, we first must prioritize lowering rates of community transmission of COVID-19. Public health officials are best equipped to direct these efforts and provide guidance for community activities based on local conditions.

Unless significant reduction in community transmission has been accomplished, a return to in-person schooling will result in unnecessary illness and death. Schools that return to in-person learning in communities with a high level of transmission will be placed in an impossible position. They likely will face the need to close again because of outbreaks, causing unnecessary additional disruption to education and specialized instructional support services for students.

As such, it is our position that in order for schools to safely re-open for in-person instruction, the following conditions must be met:

- The health and safety of students, families, staff, and the community must be top priority. There must be clear cut policies and procedures that detail how schools will:
 - Ensure students and staff are physically distanced
 - Ensure proper ventilation and sanitization of buildings;
 - Respond to a positive case(s) of COVID-19 in the school community, to include details on if they will test, how they will test and engage in contact tracing within the school community to minimize the risk spread among the school community. These must be developed in collaboration with public health officials, and clearly communicated to staff and parents;
 - Meet the educational, social-emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs of students in both a virtual, hybrid, or fully in-person setting. These plans must include adequate staffing levels of specialized instructional support personnel.
 - Ensure that students with disabilities are able to access education and specialized instructional support services, while protecting both students and staff who are at higher risk of COVID-19 transmission and complications.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided to students and staff. PPE must be appropriate for the individual needs of students and staff, in order to facilitate learning and related services. Under no circumstance should a staff member or student be required to provide their own PPE. Student health interventions that have the potential to aerosolize respiratory fluids require enhanced respiratory protection for the care provider. See [NASN/NASSNC Guidance for HealthCare Personnel on the Use of Personal Protective Equipment in Schools During COVID-19](#)
- Districts must detail flexible quarantine leaves, both for individual staff who must quarantine or leave to care for sick family members and for all personnel if schools have to close to manage outbreaks. No staff member should be in danger of losing pay or their job if they need to utilize quarantine leave or they get sick themselves. Additional staff may need to be hired to manage continued service delivery during staff absences.
- Capacity to deliver telehealth and tele-instruction must be improved to ensure that all students have access to high quality academic instruction as well as services provided by specialized instructional support personnel. These efforts must include providing access to internet service and appropriate devices to families who lack access, and increased capacity for specialized instructional support personnel and other staff to provide services through telehealth and tele-instruction.

Without additional federal funds, schools will encounter challenges in meeting the outlined criteria to ensure the safety of students and staff, as well as access to instruction. We call on Congress to swiftly pass COVID-19 response legislation that includes *at least* \$375 Billion for the education stabilization fund, of which no less than \$175B is reserved for K-12 education. In addition, we urge you to allocate \$11 billion for state grants under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), \$900 million for IDEA early childhood education programs, and \$300 million for IDEA personnel development grants, as outlined in *The Supporting Children with Disabilities during COVID-19 Act* (S.4100). This funding will be critical to help offset the enormous costs incurred by schools and districts as they make investments in technology products, services, and personnel training and move to re-open schools and educate all students, including students with disabilities.

We understand and fully support the value that in-person instruction provides to students, families, and communities. We also are deeply concerned that the costs of this pandemic are inequitably borne by communities of color and that keeping schools closed for in-person instruction could negatively impact low income and economically marginalized communities and students with disabilities the most. These problems are real and devastating. However, it is unconscionable to place children, families, and staff at even greater risk by returning to in-person learning, while also failing to provide the necessary conditions for success.

We are happy to speak further about how Congress can support SISP and the students we serve. For further information, please feel free to contact Abe Saffer, NASISP Co-Chair (asaffer@aota.org), or Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, NASISP Co-Chair (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org).

NASISP Members

American Art Therapy Association
American Council for School Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American School Counselor Association
American Speech Language Hearing Association
Council for Exceptional Children
National Association of Pupil Services Administration
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of Social Workers
National Education Association
School Social Work Association of America

The National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP) is a 501(c)(6) organization that represents over a million Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) nationwide. SISP professionals provide and support school-based prevention and intervention services to address barriers to educational success, ensure positive conditions for learning, and help all students achieve academically and ultimately become productive citizens.

SISP collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents, and families to ensure that all students are successful in school. NASISP seeks to empower SISP professionals by encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration, and affirming their role in education's best practices and their involvement in school improvement efforts.

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