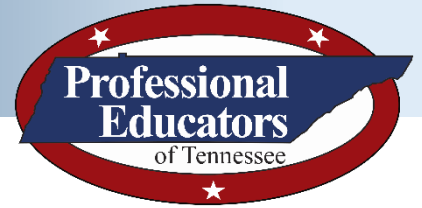


EDITORIAL

August 10, 2021 Online at www.proedtn.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAXIMIZING HEALTH IS A CHALLENGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY IN K12

Any time we gather in a large public assembly, there are certain precautions we need to undertake for public safety. Public education has nearly 1 million K-12 students across Tennessee. That means that on any given day there are a large number of students and adults in one location. We have to consider health and safety as essential elements to provide in education. There is an abundance of issues.

Everyone wants to discuss or COVID in schools and COVID is certainly a timely and necessary subject. Masks and vaccinations discussions are ongoing across the state and nation. COVID is more likely to impact adults than children. Protecting our children and teachers are a critical priority.

SUMMARY

Now more than ever, we have to consider health and safety as essential elements to provide in education.

For COVID, adults with serious and chronic kidney disease, immune deficiencies, severe neurological conditions, and multiple co-morbidities are at substantially increased risk of death. I am not trying to minimize any risk, but according to the latest [CDC data](#), nearly four out of five covid deaths in the U.S. were among those over age 65 (480,000 of 606,000). Policymakers and stakeholders alike must look at issues such as increased sick days and bereavement policies for personnel.

Every legislative session this is an issue, so it is probably time we place a defibrillator in every school. Statistically, for every minute someone is in cardiac arrest without CPR and access to a defibrillator, their chances of survival are reduced. Therefore, schools should have access to a defibrillator close enough to help save the life of someone having a cardiac arrest. Currently, only public high schools are required to have Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs). Public middle, elementary, and private schools are not required but are encouraged to have AEDs. AEDs are referenced throughout state law. We also have a "Good Samaritan Law" that protects people who render emergency care.

It is well-known that lead is a toxic metal that is especially harmful to children. In May 2018, the Tennessee Legislature passed a law requiring school districts to implement policies to test for [lead in drinking water sources](#) in schools. Lead can enter drinking water at a school through a school's internal plumbing and fixtures, especially those that were installed prior to the passage of the "lead free" act in 1988. It is expected that an appropriate response and targeted remediation efforts will be taken reducing children's exposure to lead. Where are we on addressing that issue?

Along the same lines, [Good Morning America](#) featured another emerging issue on the need by schools to "filter and/or clean the air in the school by improving the level of filtration as much as possible." It is common sense

that crowded spaces, such as public-school classrooms, need to be well-ventilated. The air filtration system or HVAC system may need to be updated. We know that needs to be addressed.

School leaders have to make certain schools are healthy places, and they can meet the unique challenges each school may face. That means that in addition to measures that are being taken for COVID prevention, we need to address issues like Automated External Defibrillators, lead in drinking water, and clean air in our schools.

There seems to always be problems we need to address as a society. As Jayson DeMers founder and CEO of AudienceBloom, points out “rather than seeing problems as burdensome forces of opposition, they see problems as opportunities--opportunities to learn, grow, improve, or adjust in a way that leaves them better off than before the problem existed.”

#####

JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact communications@proedtn.org or 1-800-471-4867.