

Arkansas Education Association President Carol Fleming told state lawmakers it is unsafe for schools to return to traditional, on-campus learning methods for the 2020-21 school year on Monday morning.

Fleming argued on the behalf of beginning the school year with online-only learning methods to the Education Caucus of the Arkansas General Assembly, with Senator Alan Clark and Representative Mark Lowery present to hear her message.

"When we look at the state-reported data about this virus and listen to health experts and educators, it is clear; we are simply not ready to reopen schools to onsite, in-person instruction state-wide," Fleming said. "Arkansas has not yet (contained) this virus enough to safely reopen our schools."

Fleming outlined the reasons the AEA does not consider reopening schools state-wide a safe measure, citing high positivity rates among Arkansas counties and conveying disapproval of the action by educators.

"Educators must be fully engaged in decision-making and implementation," She said. "We must listen to educator voices. AEA recently released the results of a statewide poll of educators, with just under 6,200 responding. That showed 90 percent of them are extremely concerned about the safety of returning to on-site, in-person learning for the entire school community."

She also shared four specific principles the AEA Return to Learn Committee believes must be met to keep students, teachers and parents safe in order for in-person learning to be a viable option.