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Contact:

James Minichello 703-774-6953

jminichello@aasa.org

Jason Amos

703-838-6719

jamos@nsba.org

AASA, NSBA Issue Joint Statement Calling for End to Threats and Violence Around Safe School Opening Decisions

Alexandria, Va. – September 22, 2021 – [AASA, The School Superintendents Association](#), and the [National School Boards Association](#) (NSBA) released the following statement today in response to increasingly tense public forums and online discussions related to safe school openings amid the enduring COVID-19 pandemic.

AASA and NSBA: “As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact everyone, we are concerned with the increasing reports of our members—school superintendents and school board members—who are working to ensure a safe reopening of schools while addressing threats and violence, and being undermined by those who do not agree with their school guidelines for COVID-19 best practices. School leaders across the country are facing threats because they are simply trying to follow the health and scientific safety guidance issued by federal, state and local health policy experts.”

Daniel A. Domenech, executive director, AASA: “The work of school superintendents and board members, whose job is to run and operate a school system, have faced countless new challenges throughout the last 20 months. Leading these schools during a global pandemic is an enormous task, one that is unnecessarily complicated when adult tempers flare. The work to open schools and the discussions at school board meetings are focused on a goal we all support: getting and keeping our kids safe in school. We oppose the increasingly aggressive tactics creeping into board and community meetings, and we cannot let frustrations and tensions evolve into name calling and intimidation. We will never back down from the importance of freedom of speech, but we cannot—and will not—tolerate aggression, intimidation, threats and violence toward superintendents, board members and educators.”

Chip Slaven, interim executive director and CEO, NSBA: “School board members must be allowed to act in their students’ best interests, or we risk losing the progress we have made. School board members around the country are doing everything they can to keep our students in classrooms and protect them while they are there. They are consulting with health experts, studying state and local caseloads and vaccination rates, and talking to parent and community members about the safest way to have students back in school buildings. School board members are our neighbors. They attend our churches and shop at our grocery stores. They have children in the public education

system and share the same concerns as the communities they represent. Doing what's best for each child in their school district is at the heart of every decision a school board member makes. But for their hard work, school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers and others who work in service to our students are being subjected to online and in-person threats, abuse and harassment. This must stop.”

Paul Imhoff, 2021-22 president of AASA; superintendent, Upper Arlington Schools, Upper Arlington, Ohio: “The number-one priority for school superintendents and school board members is to keep students safely in school and engaged in in-person learning. Leadership requires tough decisions and uncomfortable conversations, and we are confident in the ability of superintendents and school boards to continue to work tirelessly to ensure we can keep students safely in school—learning, growing and thriving.”

Viola M. Garcia, president of NSBA; trustee, Aldine Independent School District, Houston, Texas: “School board members are used to heated meetings and interactions around difficult decisions like hiring a superintendent, passing the budget or school redistricting. Disagreements and heated opinions are ok. Shouting contests, harassment, abuse and threats—both online and in-person—are absolutely not. School board members want to hear from the communities they serve, especially during this critical moment in the pandemic. But community input must remain respectful and civil, even if it is in opposition.”

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For specific questions, please contact Noelle Ellerson Ng, AASA associate executive director, advocacy and governance, at nellerson@aasa.org or Jason Amos, NSBA director of communications, at jamos@nsba.org.