

# Miami's teachers union seeks PPE, sanitation donations ahead of school reopening Monday

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As Miami-Dade's public schools [scramble to welcome back](#) students into the classroom beginning Monday, the teachers union is collecting donations of PPE and sanitation supplies for educators.

The United Teachers of Dade has been [making unannounced visits](#) to schools to check for spaced-out desks, hand sanitizers and clear signage for social distancing and designated seating. They've said while some schools are prepared, others aren't, with some supplies on back order.

"Let's focus on reopening safely by giving our education workforce the supplies that they need so that the protective bubbles that we have ensured for our students can continue to protect us," said union president Karla Hernandez-Mats.

On Thursday, the union announced a community drive seeking donations from the public for hand sanitizer, antibacterial soap, masks, shields, masking tape, paper towels, antibacterial wipes, and disinfecting spray and money for additional supplies.

Those supplies will be available for educators to pick up on an as-needed basis. For some teachers, Friday — a mandatory teacher workday — will be their first time in the classroom.

"Tomorrow is going to be very telling," Hernandez-Mats said.

Those donations can be dropped off Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the union's new headquarters: 5553 NW 36th St. in Miami Springs. Dropoff will also be available this weekend, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

The union has already received donations from Congresswoman Donna Shalala, D-Miami, who gave six palettes of supplies worth \$2,500. City Works, a public works and infrastructure company, donated \$15,000 worth of masks and 1,000 units of 8-ounce hand sanitizer bottles.

Former Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas' initiative, [#ServingMiamiDade](#), committed to donating 4,000 masks and the American Federation of Teachers provided 25,000 face shields to be shared among Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. The South Florida Council of Firefighters donated \$1,000 for securing additional supplies.

School district spokeswoman Jackie Calzadilla wrote in an email that the district "prioritized resources to increase existing inventories of cleaning supplies, purchase large quantities of PPE, develop and print signage and procure additional equipment for schools to comply with safety protocols."

She sent a list of supplies purchased by the district, including electrostatic sprayers, Tyvek suits and thermometers.

“With these investments, our schools are now equipped with sufficient PPE and sanitization supplies to safely welcome our students and employees back to the schoolhouse for the 2020-2021 school year,” she wrote. “As always, we welcome community partners that want to support public education and provide additional resources.”

The state has a program to help teachers buy classroom supplies, but the Florida Classroom Supply Assistance Program does not cover personal protective equipment needed to protect teachers and students. In fact, [Brigette Kinney, an English teacher at Coral Gables Senior High, told WLRN she spent \\$230 of her own money to buy plexiglass dividers for her classroom.](#)

“I’m going to have students coming in and sitting at a desk and touching things and then leaving,” Kinney told WLRN. “And then more students will come in and sit in those same desks. And we’re not allowed to spend our supply money on something to wipe down the desks. It just doesn’t make any sense.”

Hernandez-Mats encouraged parents to keep students at home learning online.

“That is the safest place for your child to be during a pandemic,” she said.

For those who choose to send their children to school, Hernandez-Mats recommended sending children to school with their own pack of hand sanitizer and to remind them to wear their masks the entire school day.

She also said parents should ask their children about how many classmates are in their classroom, how close or apart they were to their friends and what the social distance markings are like since parents cannot walk into schools.

The United Teachers of Dade, along with Broward Teachers Union, previously [launched an awareness campaign](#) called #SafeSchoolsSFL urging parents to publicly document the conditions in their child’s classroom.

Also on Thursday, union leaders met via Zoom video conference with district officials to discuss issues ahead of reopening schools, as required by a School Board vote on Tuesday.

“So far, they’ve been good about listening to what we’re hearing on the ground and they’ve been good with making those corrections,” Hernandez-Mats said.

She said some schools, like Leisure City K-8, have been better at preparing for reopening schools than others. She said the principal at that school, where 60% of students reportedly opted for online learning, has been working to put families and teachers at ease. Hernandez-Mats said only one or two teachers there preferred teaching from home.

In July, Hernandez-Mats opted for her own children, a first-grader and a fifth-grader, to return to school for in-person learning. She says her children will stay home from school on Monday and be marked absent all next week because she isn’t ready to send them into the classroom.

“I really thought they were going to have the class size taken care of,” she said. “A lot of things have changed since the summer.”

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article246156155.html>