



November 18, 2020

Dr. Peter Beilenson, MD, MPH, Sacramento County Department of Public Health
David W. Gordon, Superintendent, Sacramento County Office of Education

Dear Dr. Beilenson and Mr. Gordon,

We are writing this letter on behalf of the educators and the students we serve in Sacramento County's TK-12 public schools in regard to the ongoing policies, guidance, and conditions under which schools will reopen for in-person instruction.

We appreciate the dramatic impact of the coronavirus pandemic in the daily lives and health of everyone in our county. As educators, we too want to be back with our students doing the work that we love, but we cannot ignore prevention science and school safety standards. **Our position from the beginning has been simple: California cannot physically open schools for in-person instruction until it is safe.**

In your positions leading Sacramento County's public health and public education systems, we are concerned that even after Sacramento County reverted back into the "widespread" or "purple tier" according to the California Department of Public Health COVID Dashboard on November 9, 2020, schools in the Folsom-Cordova Unified School District and St. HOPE Public Schools were allowed to reopen.

Health experts have continually said that while no one method of prevention by itself is 100 percent effective, layered safety strategies within schools boost prevention, with each measure knocking off some percentage of COVID-19 transmission risk. That is why we were so heartened to hear California Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond's [comments on MSNBC](#). Our state's chief education advisor stood up for safety when she agreed with Dr. Uche Blackstock on the need for "ventilation, masks, being able to separate and cohort students into smaller groups, having space, as well as school nurses." She was on point regarding the need for additional funding for our schools. And Dr. Darling-Hammond was clear about the importance of adequate testing protocols and having programs in place at schools for rapid detection and quarantining.

Unfortunately, schools in Sacramento County under your leadership are opening without comprehensive safety protections and without testing-for-prevention programs required for the safest learning environment. While the [CDC](#) acknowledges that inhaling infectious particles is thought to be the main way COVID-19 spreads and [air scientists](#) have been sounding this alarm bell for months, we hear reports from educators every day of outdated HVAC ventilation systems, windows that won't open, and portable classrooms with historically high CO₂ levels. We also hear reports of too few school nurses, no training on COVID-19 protocols, understaffing, lack of transparency regarding cases and outbreaks, and testing-for-prevention and rapid tracing glaringly absent or uncoordinated.

Safe school reopening requires your leadership to coordinate and operationalize compliance checks to ensure that safety measures are actually implemented including: regular and accessible testing-for-prevention dedicated to schools; rapid case notification and contact tracing; isolation support and medical care for our most vulnerable students and families; and data transparency of cases, outbreaks, and quarantines in schools. Last week's commencement of in-person classes in Folsom-Cordova and St. HOPE while Sacramento County was and remains in the purple tier is contrary to the safety protections our staff and students deserve.

Testing & Contact Tracing:

COVID-19 testing is one very important area that requires county leadership. **Experts agree that testing is critical to prevent transmission and outbreaks in schools. Yet the state and county have created an environment where schools can open without an integrated program for testing and tracing.**

A county solution with county leadership is needed. As an example of what an efficient testing program could look like, we point to the cooperative, integrated agreement reached by the San Diego Unified School District, the University of California San Diego and the San Diego Education Association. This program, guided by science and the expertise of world-renowned UC faculty, will be able to test every student and staff member at school sites on a frequent basis. This plan, which is integrated with comprehensive mitigation measures, will consider school and community transmission rates in order to quickly adjust the testing frequency based on disease trends.

A failure to develop a county-wide approach will exacerbate educational and health inequities as only the most well-resourced and private schools will be able to pay for regular testing-for-prevention – leaving public schools to suffer both the health consequences and the “yo-yo” effect of opening and then closing again due to the spread of the virus. A thoughtful approach to onsite testing integrated with a comprehensive COVID-19 prevention program, comparable to the agreed-upon program in San Diego Unified, is required.

Health Equity & Educational Equity Are Connected

We urge you to invest in and achieve COVID-19 health equity in all neighborhoods, zip codes, and census tracts before in-person instruction resumes, even in hybrid form. When some get a head start, it deepens inequality. We worry that the politicized rush to open school doors without rigorous prevention standards and essential resources places unsafe pressure on low income communities and our most under-resourced public schools. **No matter where a family lives, they should have the**

assurance that their neighborhood has low COVID-19 rates and that their child's school has a complete set of safety measures in place.

All districts in Sacramento County should comply with the recommendations set forth in the [“Ventilation and Energy Efficiency Verification/Repair Program” set forth by the National Energy Management Institute and the UC Davis Energy and Efficiency Institute, White Paper Version 3 \(September 1, 2020\)](#). Compliance should be verified by independent experts to provide the safety oversight our staff and students deserve.

Transparency Builds Trust

We urge you to also establish an online dashboard that reports by district and school the number of cases, outbreaks, and quarantines. Dashboards from the [State of New York](#) and [State of Mississippi](#) are two examples. A transparent system fosters trust and will provide our community with a greater understanding of COVID-19 transmission and prevention.

Safe and Equitable Schools

As leaders in Sacramento County we need you to ensure that all steps have been taken to prevent school-based transmission and that compliance checks **and an onsite, regular testing program** are in place at those schools that have prematurely reopened and before any other schools are allowed to reopen.

By this letter, we are requesting a meeting with each of you to further discuss the immediate steps that you will take to keep our schools, students, and community safe during this unprecedented global pandemic.

A representative on behalf of the signatories to this letter will be contacting you shortly to schedule a meeting.

Respectfully yours,



Vanessa Mason, President
Center Unified Teachers Association



Rick Stancil, President
Elk Grove Education Association



Angelica Miklos, President
Folsom Cordova Education Association



Heather Wetzels, President
Galt Elementary Faculty Association



Brenda Borge, President
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Marsha Montgomery, President
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Leah Boylan, President
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Rebecca LeDoux, President
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cc: Sacramento County Board of Supervisors