



October 22, 2020

L. Karen Monroe, Superintendent of Alameda County Schools
 Nicholas J. Moss, MD, MPH (Interim), Alameda County Public Health Officer

Dear Superintendent Monroe and Dr. Moss,

We write this letter on behalf of the over 11,000 educators and the students we serve in Alameda County’s TK-12 public schools regarding the ongoing policies, guidance, and conditions under which schools are attempting to open for in-person instruction.

About 250,000 students and staff learn and work in Alameda County’s K-12 public schools. If you consider that many students and staff live with one or more other people -- parents, guardians, siblings, spouses, elderly parents, and grandparents -- our public schools touch a very significant portion of our county’s residents. And, each day students and staff travel across many neighborhoods and cities to get to school. We are all connected throughout Alameda County.

We appreciate the dramatic impact of the 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 unless it is safe.**

A Layered Defense Against COVID-19 in Our Schools

In your positions leading Alameda County’s public education system and public health system, we urge you to ensure strong COVID-19 prevention measures in our schools as you consider bringing back together hundreds of thousands of students and staff indoors, for many hours in a day, in historically poorly ventilated spaces, often with large class sizes and serious underfunding. This moment will define how we value our students, our communities, our families, and our essential workers.

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 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. **We should be clear-eyed about this reality.**

Alameda County leaders must take all the necessary steps toward full preparedness. Safe school reopening will require the county to coordinate and operationalize compliance checks to ensure safety measures are actually implemented; 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 school families; and data transparency of cases, outbreaks, and quarantines in schools.

Testing & Contact Tracing: Essential Safety Layers

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

A county solution is needed. It is unrealistic to expect individual school districts with varying levels of resources and expertise to take on this task all on their own. We appreciate the County Office of Education’s effort to begin to address this with its [recent contract with Curative labs](#). We look forward to learning about the contract details and the services that will be available. However, many health experts recommend that a broader scope and greater frequency is needed for prevention than Alameda County currently suggests.

As an example of what an efficient testing program could look like, we point to a study by the [Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy](#), which says “a basic screening strategy will require approximately 200 million tests each month for students and staff at the nation’s primary and secondary schools and residents and staff at nursing homes for them to open safely and in stages.” The report calls for testing all “students and staff every two weeks” and an increased frequency when disease trends worsen.

For these reasons, we believe only the county and state have the ability to effectively and cost-efficiently marshal the resources and expertise for rapid, onsite, frequent testing and effective

contact tracing in Alameda County’s public education system. **To do otherwise exacerbates 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 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 a return to in-person instruction. 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 rest assured that their neighborhood has low COVID-19 rates and that their child’s school has a complete set of safety measures in place.**

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 the [State of Mississippi](#) provide just two examples. A transparent system fosters trust and will provide our community with a greater understanding of COVID-19 transmission and prevention.

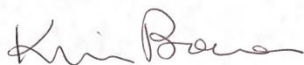
Safe, Equitable, and Well-Funded Schools

We urge you and other leaders in Alameda County to be proactive. Students, educators, and school families should have clear guarantees that *all* steps have been taken to prevent school-based transmission and that compliance checks are in place.

We need our county government officials to lead and help our schools maintain the safest learning environments. We are a county of great innovation and wealth in a state with the fifth largest economy in the world. We should not have to put our students and staff in harm’s way. We need safe, equitable, and well-funded schools – this is what Alameda County’s students deserve.

We look forward to further discussion with you as we strive to keep our schools, students, and community safe during this unprecedented global pandemic.

Sincerely,



Kim Boerner, President
Alameda County Teachers Association



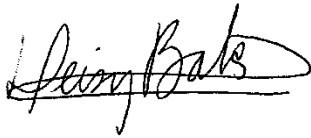
Ericka Castillo, President
Emery Teachers’ Association



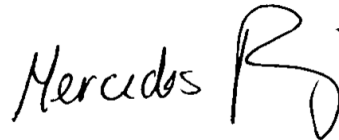
Judith Klinger, President
Alameda Education Association



Victoria Birbeck-Herrera, President
Fremont Unified District Teachers Association



Deisy Bates, President
Association of Educational Office and
Technical Employees



Mercedes Faraj, President
Hayward Education Association



Gabriel Kessler, President
Association of Piedmont Teachers



Aimee Thompson, President
Livermore Education Association



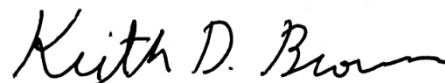
Michelle VerKuilen, President
Association of Pleasanton Teachers



Joe Ku'e Angeles, President
New Haven Teachers Association



Mark Mladinich, President
Castro Valley Teachers Association



Keith Brown, President
Oakland Education Association



Lieba Schneiderman and Victoria Albaracin
Co-Presidents
Coalition of Educators for Change



Thomas Morse, President
San Leandro Teachers Association

Roberta Kreitz

Roberta Kreitz, President
Dublin Teachers Association



Karen Rosa, President
San Lorenzo Education Association

Hari Vasu-Devan

Hari Vasu-Devan, President
East Bay Innovation Academy
Teachers Association

Coalition of Oakland School for the Arts
Teachers and Staff Bargaining Team Members

cc: Joaquín J. Rivera, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 1
Angela Normand, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 2
Ken Berrick, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 3
Aisha Knowles, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 4
Janevete Cole, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 5
Eileen McDonald, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 6
Yvonne Cerrato, Alameda County Board of Education Trustee – Area 7
Scott Haggerty, Alameda County First District Supervisor
Richard Valle, Alameda County Second District Supervisor
Wilma Chan, Alameda County Third District Supervisor
Nate Miley, Alameda County Fourth District Supervisor
Keith Carson, Alameda County Fifth District Supervisor