



January 27, 2021

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Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom,

Today we are hopeful. We have a chance to engage in full partnership with our national leaders on a coordinated and funded federal plan to address the COVID-19 pandemic that will help us protect our communities and open our schools safely and in person. However, a renewed partnership and coordination with our national leaders is not enough. Hope is not enough. Today, we urgently need to plan with clarity and common sense, and to act assertively nationally, statewide and locally to protect our schools so we can open safely and in person.

Currently, there are at least three COVID-19 variants worldwide. Last week, the [CDC released this report on the new B117 variant](#) emerging in the United States that is even more highly transmissible. The presence of this variant in [California](#) is on top of a surge that has [disproportionately impacted](#) communities of color and stressed our healthcare system.

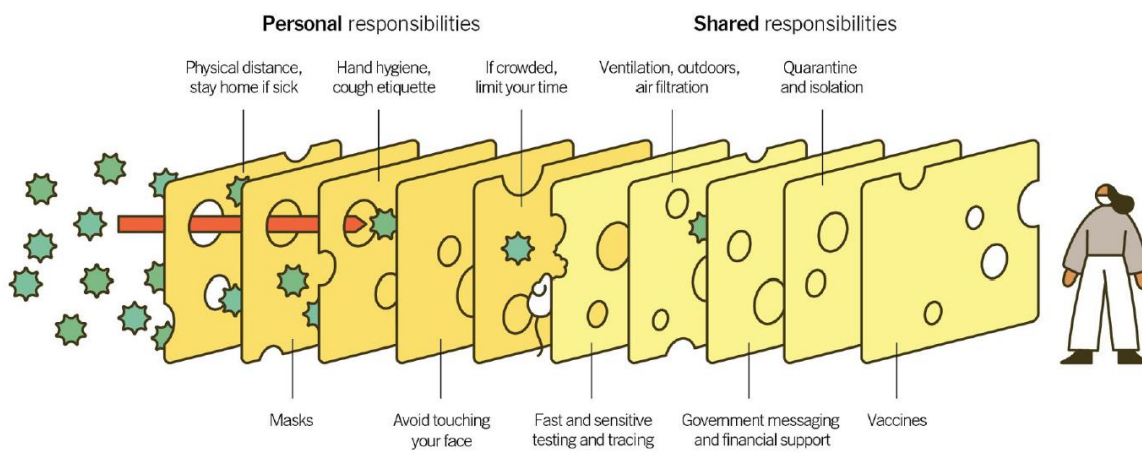
This turn in our public health crisis calls for renewed urgency. California needs to have an aggressive plan focused on statewide safety measures to slow the spread along with a more rapid and effective vaccine rollout for essential workers, for educators, and for parents/guardians who work in critical infrastructure industries like food and agriculture as well as live in vulnerable communities.

We know you are facing significant challenges and pressures for which there is no existing playbook, and until now, there has been no reliable partner in Washington, D.C. We appreciate the struggles of leading in this time and believe everyone deserves grace. Nonetheless, we need a clear and coordinated state, county, and local plan that puts the health and safety of our communities first and does not take shortcuts toward the path of opening schools in person. To do otherwise will continue the “yo-yo” effect we warned of [last summer](#) and [this fall](#)—opening schools, only to then close them because we failed to have the necessary layered protections and asymptomatic testing in place.

CTA has said from the beginning: low community transmission rates, a strong public health infrastructure, and layered prevention measures within schools that are effectively maintained, tracked and enforced are the path forward. Those actions, combined with an effective vaccine rollout, are necessary to get our schools open for in-person education. These are common-sense steps that are consistent with advice and findings of recent research from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), as demonstrated in the following illustration.

Multiple Layers Improve Success

The Swiss Cheese Respiratory Pandemic Defense recognizes that no single intervention is perfect at preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Each intervention (layer) has holes.



Source: Adapted from Ian M. Mackay (virologydownunder.com) and James T. Reason. Illustration by Rose Wong

California also needs an aggressive public health communications campaign to help get all of our communities rowing together. Finally, we need a plan that provides continuity and improvement of learning now and in the long term.

CTA recognizes the work of your team and the goals of the Safe Schools for All Plan set forth by your administration. As you have said, CTA's advocacy on behalf of California's students, their families and educators was "foundational" in many of the safety goals, standards and enforcement mechanisms outlined in the plan. While we and many others within the education labor and management community continue to have concerns with implementation timelines and the use of Proposition 98 dollars for school safety as opposed to the instructional and programmatic needs of schools, we remain committed partners in helping to reopen California's public schools. In this spirit, we recommend the following next steps:

1. **Keep the community safe.** Take immediate measures to limit transmission of the virus statewide over the next 100 days as targeted by President Biden, with final duration based on moving communities out of the Purple Tier. From the most recent [CDC alert](#) on this topic: *The increased transmissibility of this new variant requires an even more rigorous combined implementation of vaccination and mitigation measures (e.g., distancing, masking, and hand hygiene) to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2. These measures will be more effective if they are instituted sooner rather than later to slow the initial spread of the B.1.1.7 variant. Efforts to prepare the health care system for further surges in cases are warranted. Increased transmissibility also means that higher than anticipated vaccination coverage must be attained to achieve the same level of disease control to protect the public compared with less transmissible variants.*

Immediate steps during this time should include, but not be limited to:

- Stay in distance learning in all schools while in the Purple Tier.
- Improve the vaccination rollout program by maximizing the existing supply chain (consistent with the goal of prioritizing in-person education), improving logistics and communicating a clear plan ready for execution upon announcement. Schools are the heart of our communities. They are familiar, trusted, and convenient locations and can play an important role in vaccinating our communities. The rollout should include school-based and other accessible sites where school staff, their eligible household members, and students' parents, guardians, and household members who are essential workers or seniors can be vaccinated at the same time—providing even greater wrap-around protection for our school communities. Special consideration must be given to Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other communities that we know are most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- Enhance enforcement of health orders and Cal/OSHA regulations in workplace settings. This will play a key role toward community health equity for school families. Recent [California research](#) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, working-age adults ages 18-64 experienced a 22% increase in mortality compared to historical periods. In-person essential work is a likely venue of transmission of the coronavirus infection with high excess mortality disproportionately impacting workers of color.
- Continue to encourage and enforce clear expectations on physical interactions, masking and asymptomatic testing. Again, from the most recent [CDC alert](#):

*CDC's modeling data show that **universal use of and increased compliance with mitigation measures and vaccination are crucial to reduce the number of new cases and deaths substantially in the coming months.** Further, **strategic testing of persons without symptoms of COVID-19, but who are at increased risk for infection with SARS-CoV-2, provides another opportunity to limit ongoing spread.** Collectively, **enhanced genomic surveillance** combined with increased compliance with public health mitigation strategies, including vaccination, physical distancing, use of masks, hand hygiene, and isolation and quarantine, will be essential to limiting the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and protecting public health.*

Back this effort with a full-scale public service communications campaign beyond the “Vaccinate All 58 Campaign” designed to raise awareness and encourage compliance using digital, TV, radio, direct mail, *and* community organizing efforts. While we appreciate your efforts to communicate on a regular basis, we must also use varied and local messengers that are most credible in our many communities.

2. **Prepare to open schools in person and stay open safely.** During the time span outlined above, focus on getting all schools prepared for a phased in-person opening. Once completed, vaccines for employees are a key element to safe in-person school reopening. The full effect of the vaccine on infection and transmission is not yet clear and vaccine studies among children are not yet complete. So, we can't lose sight that safety measures like regular asymptomatic testing, contact tracing, face coverings, physical distance, small and stable cohorts, good ventilation, and handwashing remain critical to protect the health and safety of the entire school community. Transparent data collection and release is critical.

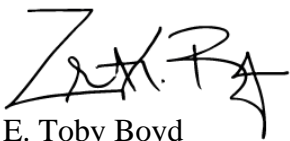
3. **Provide substantially enhanced learning opportunities.** During World War II, we asked a generation of 18–26-year-olds to fight a war to save this country. They did. Many died, which is about the same number that has been lost to COVID. Returning soldiers who were fighting the war might have been in college or earning a wage during this time in their young lives. The U.S. government knew we had to win the war first, but afterward made sure every soldier had G.I. Bill benefits that paid for their college or trade education expenses, housing support and healthcare.

Once we defeat the virus, we need to do the same thing for this generation of students. We need to be sure they get fully funded and enhanced early childhood, K-12, and college or trade school education. We may debate on some of the policy specifics and how to fund it, but we must address racial equity failures, poverty and the chronic underfunding of California public schools and colleges, which was a severe problem *before* the pandemic. Pandemic or not, we cannot continue feeding racial inequities and expect to see improvements with a school system that is in the bottom quartile of state funding in this nation, while California’s economic output is the fifth highest in the world.

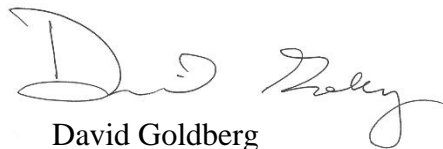
There are no shortcuts for stopping this surge and the new variants. The virus is in charge right now and it does not own a calendar. We cannot just pick an artificial calendar date and expect to flip a switch on reopening every school for in-person instruction. What we can do is move towards in-person opening in a deliberate way when it is safe because we have done the hard work to get there by limiting community spread and because we have distributed a vaccine. If opening schools for in-person instruction is more than just rhetoric and really a priority, hard decisions to substantially slow the spread of the virus need to be taken. And when we do return, make it worthwhile, and supersize supports to help the students who need it, the parents who deserve it, and the educators who bring it.

For additional CTA information, visit www.cta.org/Covid-19.

Sincerely,



E. Toby Boyd
CTA President



David Goldberg
CTA Vice President



Leslie Littman
CTA Secretary Treasurer

c: Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins
Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond