



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOLS



January 6, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

While pleased that _____ prioritizes the reopening of public schools with substantial funding, we cannot ignore that the plan fails to address the needs of the urban school districts that serve nearly a quarter of California students, almost all of whom live below the poverty level.

The plan does not address the disproportionate impact the virus is having on low-income communities of color. It leaves the definition of a safe school environment and the standard for reopening classrooms up to the individual discretion of 1,037 school districts, creating a patchwork of safety standards in the face of a statewide health crisis. And it also reverses a decade-long commitment to equity-based funding.

As the *Los Angeles Times* noted in response to the plan: _____ - income schools will receive the worst of everything no new funding, kids still stuck learning from home while those in more affluent areas open for business and get \$450 per student extra

Our schools stand ready to resume in-person instruction as soon as health conditions are safe and appropriate. But we cannot do it alone. The past 10 months hav4 12 Tf1 0 0 1 75.984 335.81

A clear state standard for COVID-related health issues in schools, with a requirement for in-classroom instruction to begin when the standard is met.

Public health funds, not K-12 educational funds from Prop. 98, should be used for COVID testing and vaccinations.

School-based health services should be integrated with COVID testing and vaccination plans.

Learning-loss recovery plans, including funding for summer school, need to be established now.

Reopening plans need to include specific funding for special education students.

A timetable and plan for vaccinations of school staff should be made public by February 1.

The state should begin to publish detailed information on school and district status in meeting COVID health standards, providing in-person instruction and school-based virus occurrences by February 1.

We believe these additional steps will

name. Despite heroic efforts by students, teachers and families, it will take a coordinated

provides a foundation on which to add other necessary elements which, together, will lead to the reopening of schools in the safest way possible.

Our School Districts are Ready to Reopen Classrooms if Appropriate Steps are Taken at the State Level

Since March, our districts have fed the hungry, provided the technology necessary for students to participate in online instruction, trained educators, cleaned and reconfigured school facilities and adopted new health practices to reduce the risk from the virus at schools.

Some of our districts already provide COVID tests at schools and have put in place the logistical support and data systems needed to provide vaccinations to the school community. Much of this has been at our own direction and in advance of any guidelines or support from the state.

We have prepared reopening plans addressing health and safety protocols, instructional programs and other issues including childcare. These have been shared with

The Virus is Having a Disproportionate Impact on Low-Income, Communities of Color

There is a greater occurrence of COVID in low-income communities. Black and Latino communities are two to three times more likely, respectively, than white communities to be hospitalized for COVID. They are more likely to be essential workers or those for whom work is essential to put a roof overhead or provide food for their family. They do not have the choice to work at home. A survey in Los Angeles Unified, where more than 80% of students live in poverty, showed 75% of families have had someone lose work due to the virus.

The disproportionate impact the virus is having is also reflected in schools. School-based COVID tests in December of children in Los Angeles, with no known symptoms or exposure to the virus, showed almost one in three children in the lowest-income communities had the virus compared with about 1 in 25 in more affluent areas.

The disproportionate impact is consistent across the state. There is little likelihood the low-income communities we serve will meet the proposed Safe Schools for All deadline of February 1 and many experts say even March 1 is unlikely, given current health conditions. Sadly, statewide COVID numbers appear to be moving in the wrong direction in nearly every meaningful category infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

Public health officials must tackle this challenge head-on or we will be left with more of the same: continued high rates of the virus in low-income communities that make it unsafe to reopen classrooms. The potential solutions to reduce the spread of the virus extend far beyond the schoolhouse. These may include additional testing and health measures in communities which are most impacted, further restrictions on businesses like shopping malls, job or income support for low-income families and priority vaccinations for essential workers.

If nothing changes, many stude12 Tf1 09009TFp4TDC q0.00000980912 00 1 129.38 294.05 T

Additional funding that goes only to school districts in communities with low COVID levels will reinforce the disproportionate impact of the virus. Affluent communities where family members can work from home will see schools open

School

School Reopening Plans Must Address the Needs of the Most Vulnerable Students

Safe Schools for All proposes to provide supplemental funds to schools which serve low-income students, English-learners and foster youth. But it fails to acknowledge or provide funding for the extraordinary needs of students with learning differences and disabilities who are served in greater proportions by large, urban school districts. For example, Los Angeles Unified serves almost 50 percent of all students in Los Angeles County with moderate to severe disabilities despite serving only 35% of students in the county.

Special needs students have been amongst those most impacted by the closure of school facilities and the costs are greater to serve students with disabilities. Any reopening plan needs to take this into account.

The State Must Provide School and District Information on the Health Practices of In-Person Instruction and COVID Occurrences by February 1

State guidelines on COVID must be clear, consistent and communicated to all stakeholders in the communities we serve.

We have sought to provide the most accurate information to all in our school communities to help them make informed choices about the risk in a school setting. Anecdotes, incomplete information and changing guidelines do not provide the complete picture schools need and families deserve.

elines have stated schools may consider reopening if the adjusted case count is at or below 7 per 100,000 population. Yet most community members cannot reconcile that figure to the actual case counts published every day by local health authorities because details on the state adjustment factors are not made public.

Safe Schools for All sets a new and different standard for elementary schools. It is important the public understand how the figure of 28 per 100,000 adjusted cases was determined and what science provides the foundation for this approach.

While we all recognize the need for our youngest learners to return to classrooms, it is important the reasoning behind this new standard be shared in detail so all stakeholders can have confidence in the soundness of the approach.

Schools must be made a priority and clear standards are needed to make sure every student is provided with the opportunity for in-chooses.

As we requested in our November 2 letter on this topic, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you or the appropriate designee at the earliest possible convenience. We are disappointed that discussion has not yet happened but hope the sharing of the proposed Safe Schools for All plan will provide the opportunity for the engagement we have been seeking.

The issues

