



September 16, 2020

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Honorable California Leaders,

We write this letter on behalf of the 310,000 members of the California Teachers Association and the more than 8.4 million students we serve regarding the ongoing policies, guidance, and conditions under which schools are attempting to open for in-person instruction. On July 8, 2020, we wrote to you regarding basic safety concerns around the reopening of schools and our position that **California cannot reopen schools unless they are safe.**

Our position has not changed. Our concern for the safety and welfare of students and staff has been heightened by the fact that school doors are opening, or preparing to open, across the state through small cohorts, waivers, and as counties advance through the risk levels. **Unfortunately, these schools are opening without the basic safety protections and testing required to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.**

That is why we were so heartened to hear State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond's [comments on MSNBC](#). The Governor's chief education advisor was on point 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 also on point regarding the need for additional funding for our schools.

We also strongly agreed with her remarks about the importance of adequate testing protocols and having programs in place at schools for rapid detection and quarantining. These are all the same areas where California's public schools are really struggling. *Yet schools are still being allowed to open.* We hear reports every day from educators throughout the state – in rural, urban and suburban districts – of students crowded into classrooms, districts without funds to immediately improve HVAC ventilation systems, mask wearing not embraced, too few school nurses, and testing and tracing glaringly absent.

We could not help but feel the disconnect of Linda Darling-Hammond's words on how important these safety measures are to our schools versus the reality of what we are actually doing in our state. This is, for sure, a historic failure of the Federal Government on many levels. As a result, we need our state government to lead and help our local schools prepare to open in a safe manner.

Take testing as one very important example. We all seem to agree that testing is critical to prevent transmission and outbreaks in schools. Yet the state has created an environment where counties are allowing schools to open with no system for testing and tracing. Orange County just announced plans and timelines for in-person instruction at various school districts. Only about a quarter of the districts mention testing and none of them have actual plans or resources in place to do the testing.

A state solution is needed for this statewide problem. It is unrealistic to expect over a thousand school districts or even 58 counties to take on this task individually. Educators and their districts don't have the training, resources, or funding to do this work. State guidance is not enough. Relying on individual school districts and local health officials (who have been retiring or resigning at a record pace) to coordinate what should be a statewide effort is woefully ineffective and leads to localized and politicized decision making that is damaging our public health, our public education, and our economy.

We are aware that the state has developed a contract with Perkin Elmer to provide 150,000 rapid tests per day beginning on November 1, 2020. However, 25 counties with hundreds of schools will be eligible to open beginning September 22 – a full six weeks before the tests are even in the state. This is incredibly troubling. LAUSD, which is one of the districts that is planning testing in a very direct manner, estimates costs at \$300 per student. 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 state has the ability to effectively and cost-efficiently marshal the resources and public health expertise for testing in California’s public education system. **California must fund, coordinate, and operationalize a true public health response to support public education in our state.** To do otherwise exacerbates educational and health inequities as only the elite and private schools will be able to pay for regular testing – 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.

Don't let the words of Linda Darling-Hammond on national TV ring hollow here at home. Your leadership and action are needed to ensure that robust testing, tracing, and isolation support, along with the other prevention measures, are in place before students and their educators and support staff return to in-person learning.

Sincerely,



E. Toby Boyd
CTA President



David Goldberg
CTA Vice President



Leslie Littman
CTA Secretary Treasurer

C: State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond
CTA Executive Director Joe Boyd
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