



Where We Stand on Reopening Schools and Community Colleges

Ensure the Health and Safety of Students and Staff: Schools Cannot Reopen Unless it is Safe

The health and safety of all students and staff must be the first priority and guiding principle in opening public schools and colleges for the 2020-21 school year. When we physically return to school campuses, it needs to be planned and deliberate with safety and public health at the forefront of all decision-making and with the involvement of educators and parents. There must be clear and up-to-date guidance from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on how schools open safely and responsibly, as well as triggers that require schools to physically close again. The state must provide a uniform symptoms check list that can be used to screen students and staff. The CDPH must work with CalOSHA in developing and providing training for school staff on safety protocols so there are consistent standards and expectations throughout the state. We also expect the state to support districts by providing and bulk buying personal protective equipment for students and staff.

Federal and state guidance regarding a phased reopening have focused on a sustained downward trajectory of COVID-19 cases for 14 days or no more than 1 COVID-19 case per 10,000 in the past 14 days. Districts and chapters should carefully review infection rates and trends for new cases in each area, hospitalization rates, levels of community spread, etc. in order to evaluate the overall safety of opening school buildings for in-person teaching and learning.

We want our students to be safe and ready to learn. This must include safety supports for students and educators:

- Accommodations to allow for fewer contacts among students, staff and parents.
- Accommodations to reduce class sizes and allow for six-feet physical distancing in classrooms, cafeterias, gyms, buses, and other shared spaces.
- Deep cleaning, and continuous ongoing cleaning of campuses and buses by trained school employees, and the inspection and certification of all ventilation systems.
- Students and school employees have daily health assessments before entering campus with appropriate student and school employee privacy.
- Special considerations and accommodations to protect students and staff with compromised and underlying medical conditions.
- Work with local county health officers to ensure increased testing of students and staff and develop the necessary legal documents for parent permission.
- Work with local county health departments to include schools in contact tracing, including the training of employees in that process and rapid case notification to employees and parents.

- Students and school employees wear facial coverings and practice routine and regular handwashing.
- Access to health services including nurses and medically trained personnel to assist and monitor student and employee health in collaboration with county health departments.
- Mental health counseling and emotional support by trained counselors for students, staff and the school community.
- School Illness and Injury Prevention plans should be updated and adopted prior to the first day of in person instruction.
- Schools have a robust communication system with data transparency among schools, parents, caregivers, county health departments, and school employees.

Include Educators in the Decision

Educators must continue to be part of the conversations, planning and decisions that directly impact their students, including how and when schools physically reopen and implementing robust distance learning. Educators work with our students and their families, day in and day out, and are intimately aware of the challenges they face, their life struggles and the areas in which they need attention. Any recommendations issued by the state will provide a framework and guidance for local educators and their unions to negotiate with school districts to ensure the needs of their local students and communities are met.

Provide Equitable & Effective Teaching and Learning

The past months have shined an even brighter light on the digital divide and economic inequality that exists in within our schools and communities. We have seen firsthand that students and educators in our communities of color experience education, and this COVID-19 pandemic, differently than many – if not most – of our white students and educators. Together, we must continue the call for racial justice and equity in resources and learning as we hold elected leaders, and each other, accountable.

The 2020-21 State Budget and accompanying trailer bills (SB 98/AB 77) provide flexibility to school districts on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and instructional minute requirements that will help prioritize equity in resources in offering distance learning to meet the unique needs of all students, including our most vulnerable students. The mandate extends the 2019-20 ADA hold harmless agreement to the 2020-21 school year contingent on in-person instruction or distance learning under certain parameters.

According to the legislature, section 34 of SB 98 intends to provide districts with flexibility in the manner in which K-12 instruction is provided to meet the needs of students, families, and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is the intent of the legislature that districts offer in-person instruction in 2020-21 to the greatest extent possible, and the bill refers to the need to consult and collaborate with state or local public health officials in determining whether to offer distance learning, this section is not intended to require any district to seek out or receive approval from a state or local public health officer prior to adopting a distance learning model. This section is also not intended to prevent a district from adopting a distance learning, hybrid, or mixed-delivery instructional model to ensure safety.

Well-Funded Public Schools and Colleges

There is significant work that must be done in order to safely reopen schools and colleges. Whether it is lowering contacts, accommodating for social distancing, enhancing ventilation systems, providing face coverings and cleaning supplies, or having the necessary staff for health screenings and emotional support, schools are going to need additional resources. Schools will need appropriate cleaning and sanitization, as well as safety supplies and training to prevent the spread of the virus on school campuses and transportation systems. Extra funding is needed for struggling students who may not have been able to access and engage in distance learning. Additional school nurses, counselors and other medically trained personnel will be needed to assist students.

Facing an overall budget deficit of \$54 billion, the 2020-21 State Budget limited cuts to education and educator layoffs with a series of funding deferrals and the hope of a federal relief package that only kicks the funding problems down the road. Educators and community groups calling on lawmakers to return to Sacramento after the Summer recess to address the state's revenue shortfalls directly. Among the options they should consider are suspending tax credits and exemptions, taxing the state's wealthiest billionaires, placing a temporary tax on wealthy corporations, and supporting Proposition 15, the Schools & Communities First initiative, on the November ballot. We also call on Congress to pass the HEROES Act and provide money to schools and states just as they supported businesses.

Far too many generations of California's students have shouldered the financial burden imposed by a structure that favors corporations and billionaires. Join educators and a broad community coalition as we fight for bold measures to create a more just, resilient, and healthy California that creates prosperity and opportunity for all students and families. We need safe, equitable, and well-funded public schools and colleges. It is what California's nine million students deserve.