

August 24, 2020

Department of Public Health
Public Health Officer
Sacramento County

Public Safety has been and should be our top priority - but the stubborn refusal to see ALL the risks is actually harming students - damage that will extend well after the pandemic has passed.

The Sacramento County's Stay at Home order *completely* ignores the mental, social and personal impact the order is having on students. The order is overly broad and is being enforced even for schools that have developed comprehensive plans that include masks, social distancing, no-contact, and regular disinfection. Many residents see the action as punitive - that if any school has to close, then all of them must be closed.

Numerous reports show that school closures are having a significant negative impact on the mental health of students. Mental health experts report depression and suicide rates are rising. Social isolation - a problem that schools identified as critical factor years ago - is skyrocketing and damaging student performance and well-being.

Distance learning has been proposed as part of the future of education - but most studies focused on college-age students and made clear that preparation, motivation and maturation were critical for success. For most of our High School and Jr. High students, distance learning was sprung on them with little, if any, preparation and is being operated by schools with little experience. Recent reports show that as many as 40% don't actually attend their online classes. 40 percent!

Socialization is extremely important for student's growth and developing. Isolation from their peers will have a negative long-term impact. It is imperative that Sacramento County move as quickly and carefully as possible to return our children back school!

The public-school system has guaranteed teachers their pay regardless of whether students attend school or not. I'm also informed by you that Charter Schools are likely going to be able to return to school sooner, simply because they are smaller and they are more likely to have the ability to meet all of the COVID-19 guidelines (masks, social distancing, etc.)

I cannot understand why schools like Capital Christian, which are enforcing stricter safeguards than workplaces that are allowed to open, are being targeted for closure. If they can meet safety guidelines, We MUST allow schools to open safely.

The message from County Health Officials - that High School and Jr. High students can't be trusted to follow safety guidelines - is troubling at best. And, the idea that it is easier to enforce safeguards with young children than it is with older children is comically and demonstratively false. I would ask that you provide a single piece of scientific evidence that can conclude that elementary students are easier to control than high school age students.

- more -

- page 2 -

I also question differentiating day care vs. day care with instruction. There is literally no physical difference in operations - so no medical reason to treat them differently. Both are supervised, structured environments - the only difference is that in one instance children are supervised by a teacher, while in the other they are supervised by a social worker. If day care can open, logically schools should be allowed to open.

There is literally no scientific data to validate your assumption that the spread of infection from student populations to adults has occurred. Your anecdotal examples from GA and “the east coast” lack any data and represent schools that opened with absolutely no precautions whatsoever - which is not the case here.

The State has bungled the data collection twice, so how can we possibly rely on their data to make decisions? Why are we not tracking the data ourselves?

Nonetheless, **California State has a waiver process** that allows students to return to in-person instruction in counties on the monitoring list. The list is available at: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19CountyDataTable.aspx>. If a county is below 100 infections per 100,000 population for 14 days, the state does NOT require a waiver to return to class; if it is over 200 per 100,000, the state is *recommending* that waivers not be issued. As of August 21, Sacramento County was at 149.8 infections per 100,000 population, which is well within the range allowed by the waiver process.

I seriously question why Sacramento falls within the allowable waiver and yet we are not allowing schools to avail themselves of that process to allow students to attend a school that is willing and able to follow appropriate safety rules. Neighboring counties like Yolo, Solano, and Placer are already reviewing waiver applications per the CDPH recommendations.

The governing body of the local jurisdiction (Board of Supervisors or City Council) are responsible for taking measures as may be necessary to preserve and protect the public health. Those responsibilities are not abrogated during a “pandemic” and emergency powers afforded appointed public health officers are not unlimited.

Our parents are deeply concerned about the mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing of their children. During a time when mental health is recognized as vital for every other segment of the population from homeless to incarcerated, it is unconscionable to ignore the same mental health wellbeing of students and children.

This is a formal request that you apply the rules consistently based on science and physical evidence, evaluate schools independently, and take immediate action to allow waivers (as per the CDPH guidelines) for qualified High Schools and Jr. High Schools.

Sincerely,

Sue Frost
Sacramento County Supervisor, District 4

Cc: (list)