

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 14, 2020

Orange County Department of Education
200 Kalmus Drive
Costa Mesa, CA, 92626

Dear Orange County officials,

We write today regarding the July 13th Board of Education Meeting (“Board”) where officials announced and approved recommendations for the reopening of Orange County Schools from the Board’s White Paper. It is understandable that schools, teachers, and communities would like to see schools reopen normally this fall. Last night’s Board meeting highlighted the worries held by parents about their children’s sense of normalcy and emotional health. Just as valid are the concerns for children’s, teacher’s, and staff’s physical health. We are deeply concerned by the Board’s decision to not address the health threats that COVID-19 poses to our communities with its recommendations to reopen schools without the use of face masks, social distancing, or reduced class sizes.

As of July 13, there were 1,382 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among individuals ages 0-17-years.¹ Indeed, COVID-19 cases are on the rise in the County and its surrounding areas, so we also appreciate the Orange County Health Care Agency’s (HCA) involvement with the White Paper. We request a briefing with the Board and HCA to better understand the recommendations for schools reopening in the fall. Specifically, we request that you address the following questions during the briefing:

1. How will the Board help schools reopen when they are operating with severely strained budgets?
 - a. What support is being offered to school districts in drafting reopening and distance learning plans?
 - b. What is the plan should students be transferred to different districts, i.e. bus routes and classroom settings? How many more students would you anticipate having in a classroom setting?
 - c. Will there be consequences for school districts who do not follow the Board’s recommended guidelines?

¹ Orange County Health Care Agency. COVID-19 Case Counts and Testing Figures. Retrieved here: <https://ocovid19.ocalthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc>

- d. Will the Board be providing additional recommendations on metrics, such as positivity rates or reduction in cases, that a school district’s community should reach before considering reopening schools?
 - e. Will the Board help school districts who are reconsidering their reopening decisions when community transmission and positive cases in Orange County continue to increase?
2. The California Department of Education released its *Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California’s Public Schools* on June 8th. The guidebook “recommends all staff and students should wear cloth face coverings or face shields while at school or on a bus and maintain 6 feet of physical distance during school activities.”²Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) recommends “people wear cloth face coverings in public settings and when around people who don’t live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.”³
- a. The Board’s White Paper writes “requiring children to wear masks during school is not only difficult – if not impossible to implement – but not based on science. It may even be harmful and is therefore not recommended.” What evidence and research are the Board citing with this statement?
 - b. In the Board’s review of the evidence, the White Paper only refers to papers published in 2010 and 2011, respectively.⁴ Did the Board review any emerging evidence, especially the CDC’s emerging evidence cited for the effectiveness of cloth face coverings?⁵
3. What is the Board’s recommendation for school districts if a student, student’s family member, or a faculty member were to get sick with COVID-19?
- a. Has there been discussion of a contact tracing initiative to track inter-district spread of COVID-19?
 - b. Will COVID-19 testing be provided for teachers and staff who interacted with a confirmed positive case while at work?
 - c. Will teachers receive sick leave for having to quarantine due to an exposure?
 - i. Will that sick leave be granted again if a teacher is again exposed, tests positive for COVID-19, or has another member of their household test positive for COVID-19?

² California Department of Education. *Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California’s Public Schools*. Retrieved here: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/documents/strongertogether.pdf>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Considerations for Wearing Cloth Face Coverings*. Retrieved here: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprevent-getting-sick%2Fcloth-face-cover.html

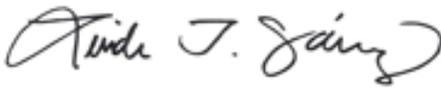
⁴ Orange County Board of Education. *Special Community Forum on “Opening Schools in Orange County” Recommendations for the Safe and Effective Reopening of Orange County Schools (White Paper)*. Page 17. Retrieved here: <https://ocde.us/Board/Documents/2020%20Agendas/Special%20Meeting%20Agenda%2007.13.2020.pdf>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

4. The Board's White Paper writes "children play a very minor role in the spread of COVID-19. Teachers and staff are in greater danger of infection from other adults, including parents, than from students in their classrooms."
- a. Were teachers and staff, as well as their union representatives, involved in these discussions of reopening?
 - b. What is the Board's plan to help schools keep teachers, administrators, support staff, cleaning staff, and all other adults in the schools safe?
 - c. Will hazard pay be provided for teachers and staff?
 - d. What have you determined is the appropriate and sufficient amount of supplies of disinfectant wipes to thoroughly clean each classroom, bathroom, meeting room, transportation vehicle, administrative office, and play area each night? Who will be doing the cleaning of these spaces and will personal protective equipment be provided?

We recognize that each school district will make final decisions on how their schools will be reopening, but we appreciate your clarifying answers in response to your recommendations. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and for your efforts to protect the health of all Orange County residents.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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CC: Orange County Health Care Agency