



Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, Fresno, Sacramento,
Long Beach, Oakland, Bakersfield, Anaheim, Santa Ana, Riverside, Stockton

October 14, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Statewide School Reopening

Dear Governor Newsom and Superintendent Thurmond,

As Big City Mayors, representing the 13 largest cities in the State -- and 11 million residents -- we write to you on the urgent and complex issue of providing safe, in-person learning opportunities for our K-12 students. These are extremely challenging times, and we understand that reopening decisions must be made by prioritizing public health, using the best data available, to carefully weigh the risks and benefits. We recognize and acknowledge the serious health concerns of teachers, parents and staff members but are also extremely concerned about the effects of prolonged distance learning and lack of access to in-person classroom resources on our children.

As mayors, we are hearing directly from our residents about young children left at home as their parents leave the house to work, about special-needs students being left behind due to normal in-person services being unavailable, and about working parents struggling to provide for their families while trying to supervise their child's online instruction. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resource gap facing poor families has exacerbated existing disparities. Black, Latino, and low-income students, students with special needs, newcomer students, homeless and foster youth are particularly at-risk of falling further behind their peers. Simply put, we are facing the greatest education equity crisis in most of our lifetimes. As cities disproportionately affected by this crisis, we ask for your leadership and offer our partnership.

Reopening schools and providing access to safe, in-person learning is a critical equity issue throughout our state but specifically for our most vulnerable students. We must prioritize in-school options for young students (K-6) who may struggle more with independent, online learning than older students. Caring for young, school-aged children has also prevented many low-income

working women, who already suffer from wage and wealth disparities, from returning to work. And while we appreciate the recently authorized “small cohort” option for schools provided via CDPH guidance, we are seeing private and parochial schools open much more quickly potentially increasing the disparities between well-resourced and under-resourced schools.

We urge our state leaders to continue to be proactive, collaborative, and creative in finding pathways to providing critical education and services to our children in a manner that does not negatively impact the health of our students, teachers, staff and families. And we urge you to move quickly and intentionally as the equity disparities are hurting children and families every day. As we make this request, we stand ready to work with you to lessen the educational impact on our most vulnerable children. For example, many cities have worked to set up “learning hubs” at municipal facilities by using city resources, in partnership with school districts and non-profit leaders, to support some of our most vulnerable populations with in-person academic and recreational activities.

We are eager to work with you to bring our most vulnerable students safely back into the classroom and look forward to partnering on the recommendations below:

- Direct as many testing resources as possible to schools in order to provide testing with rapid turnaround times (including the recently announced allocation of 150 million rapid antigen tests from the federal government to states)
- Provide additional resources and guidance to schools for acquisition of PPE, support for making physical accommodations to school sites and expansion of contact tracing programs
- Convene stakeholders statewide to develop uniform standards on priority student populations, testing and contact tracing protocols, site selection and staffing guidance and set timeline goals for the reopening of elementary schools, with the opportunity to quickly expand these opportunities to secondary school students
- In developing the uniform standards, prioritize serving 1) students with special needs, 2) Title 1 students in areas of highest poverty concentrations, 3) children of essential workers; and, 4) students who have experienced homeless and/or youth in the foster/kin care system, and 5) early learners (K-2nd grade)
- In developing the uniform standards, actively gather, analyze and distribute data from the full range of schools that have received waivers to re-open to develop best practices that could be applied in a public school setting
- Establish and provide funding for partnerships with cities and counties to develop creative solutions for using underutilized spaces such as libraries, recreation centers and other public venues to provide safe and supervised spaces for students to access remote instruction and educational support. Funding options must provide consideration to the staff and necessary extra training to support this option.

Thank you again for your leadership during this crisis.

Sincerely,

Big City Mayors Coalition



Sam Liccardo
Mayor
City of San José



Eric Garcetti
Mayor
City of Los Angeles



Kevin Faulconer
Mayor
City of San Diego



London Breed
Mayor
City of San Francisco



Lee Brand
Mayor
City of Fresno



Darrell Steinberg
Mayor
City of Sacramento



Robert Garcia
Mayor
City of Long Beach



Libby Schaaf
Mayor
City of Oakland



Karen Goh
Mayor
City of Bakersfield



Harry Sidhu
Mayor
City of Anaheim



Miguel Pulido
Mayor
City of Santa Ana



Rusty Bailey
Mayor
City of Riverside



Michael Tubbs
Mayor
City of Stockton

CC:

President Pro tempore Toni Atkins

Speaker Anthony Rendon

Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, Assembly Education Committee Chair

Senate Connie M. Leyva, Senate Education Committee Chair