



## UNMASK OUR KIDS

Dear Superintendent Bowers and Board of Trustees,

Once again California has refused to follow the science and the CDC by announcing that it will force all children and adults to wear masks in school this fall. While countless experts and the CDC all indicate that “layered prevention strategies” like masks and distancing should be implemented based on case rates and vaccinations, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has once again turned against the scientific consensus in favor of a “one size fits all” approach which indefinitely mandates masks, quarantines and testing for every school in the state even if there are zero cases of COVID-19. Additionally, there is no longer any question that the risk to children from COVID-19 is significantly lower than the flu or the now widely-circulating RSV – so low the New York Times recently noted a child is 10 times more likely to die in a car accident than from COVID-19. At this incredibly low level of risk, there is simply no reason to continue mandating masks, quarantines or testing for children, particularly when none of these measures are implemented for other more serious diseases for children.

Instead of creating flexibility and allowing school districts to determine their own best layered mitigation strategies for school reopening, CDPH focused solely on mandating masks in all schools and was apparently so adamant about this singular issue it initially attempted to illegally mandate expulsion from campus for any child who did not wear a mask. It is once again apparent that CDPH is more interested in politics than science and is only concerned with the concerns of political interest groups as opposed to the best interests of students. Even more concerning is CDPH’s decision to mandate the option with the least amount of evidence – masking – onto all students and adults, while ignoring other prevention strategies – such as ventilation – which evidence shows are far more effective.

By ignoring the CDC Guidance and implementing universal masking, CDPH claims that “treating all kids the same will support a calm and supportive school environment.” This statement is fundamentally flawed – it ironically does treat all kids similarly, *as if they are all sick* and responsible for driving the pandemic – despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. CDPH should instead be treating all kids based on their similar negligible risk – to themselves and others – by removing any restriction which stigmatizes children as vectors of disease and prevents them from being in the classroom for in-person instruction every day.

California HHS Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly claims “masking is a simple and effective intervention that does not interfere with offering full in-person instruction,” while in the very next sentence admitting that if only unvaccinated students were forced to wear masks, some would feel “singled out” – a tacit admission of the stigma and psychological damage of having to wear a mask that creates an environment not conducive

to learning. Dr. Naomi Bardach, the Safe Schools for All Team State Lead, also acknowledged that having some kids wear masks in school while others don't creates "two *classes* of students in a school" – in effect a social caste system – which "can become very detrimental if it becomes contentious, where some kids are masked and others aren't and there is bullying or stigma." In other words, despite their claims, they acknowledge the well known emotional, social and psychological detriments to wearing masks that are "detrimental" to in-person instruction.

These new rules are also clearly unconstitutional, since CDPH: 1) has fewer rules for adults and children when not in school; 2) no restrictions for mitigating viruses more dangerous than COVID-19; 3) unnecessarily keeps healthy kids out of school due to over-restrictive quarantine and oversensitive testing rules; and 4) wholly ignores naturally acquired immunity, vaccinated immunity, the negligible risk to children, and the harm from mandating masks. Any school district which signs on to these restrictions is likely to face a legal challenge similar to the one facing CDPH.

I am urging you to contact CDPH and request that they revise the 2021-2022 K-12 Schools Reopening Framework and Guidance to allow schools to individually choose the best set of mitigation measures to implement – as needed – based on local conditions. Since CDPH is leaving the enforcement of the mask mandate up to each district, I am also asking that you adopt a policy which truly removes the stigma of masks by not punishing children for non-compliance and allowing students to choose whether to wear a mask. A sample resolution is enclosed which you may utilize to publicly advocate for the best interests of students.

After everything our children suffered through last year with the arbitrary and unnecessary school closures, our students deserve a school year free from unscientific and punitive restrictions. As educational leaders in our community, it is your duty to provide that to them. They desperately need your support today.

Thank you,

Rachel Gerlovich

[Phewwww, the CDC is mostly on target in rules for reopening school this fall.](#) Joseph G. Allen, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, USA Today, July 9, 2021.

[The Kids Are Alright: Why now is the time to rethink COVID safety protocols for children – and everyone else.](#) New York Magazine, July 12, 2021.

[Kids, Covid and Delta: A guide to help parents.](#) New York Times, June 18, 2021.

[It's time for children to finally get back to normal life.](#) Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg, UC Davis; Dr. Lucy McBride; Dr. Allison Krug; Dr. Monica Gandhi, UCSF. Washington Post, May 30, 2021.

[What Really Happened With that Weird Yankees COVID Outbreak.](#) New York Magazine, May 19, 2021.

[Is a Mask That Covers the Mouth and Nose Free from Undesirable Side Effects in Everyday Use and Free of Potential Hazards?](#) International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, April 2021.

[Why a Mask is Not Just a Mask](#). Global Mental Health Programs, Columbia University, April 17, 2020.