



July 14, 2021

Dr. Mark Ghaly
Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency
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Dr. Naomi Bardach
Safe Schools for All Team Lead
California Department of Public Health
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Dear Drs. Ghaly and Bardach,

On behalf of the 55,000+ students we serve and the 5,000+ staff we employ, we are writing today to encourage you to allow our local public health officer the latitude to enforce the CDC's July 9, 2021 guidance for face coverings in schools, instead of the more restrictive rules issued by the California Department of Public Health on July 12, 2021. Specifically, **we urge you to allow fully vaccinated individuals the choice whether or not to wear a facial covering indoors at school**, a choice they are allowed in all other indoor venues in California (for example, in retail stores, restaurants, movie theaters, etc.).

The CDC recommends that schools work with local public health officials to determine the prevention strategies needed in their area by monitoring levels of community transmission and local vaccine coverage. Based on information available on state and county webpages today, the County of San Diego currently has high levels of local vaccine coverage¹ and low levels of community transmission.²

Both the CDC guidance of June 9 and the CDPH guidance of July 12 indicate that layered strategies will be most effective in preventing the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

To that end, our districts have worked tirelessly over the past 17 months to implement a layered approach to virus transmission mitigation and prevention. We've established safe reopening plans that adhere to statutory and other requirements. We've been meticulous about contact tracing and precise about quarantining. We've added filtration devices and upgraded ventilation systems. We've implemented enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols. We're making strategic use of state and federal COVID-19 relief funds to proactively address physical distancing and mitigate lost educational opportunities. We've worked in concert with our labor groups to implement and maintain high levels of health and safety protocols and procedures. We continue to work closely with San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency and their K-12 Education Sector team.

¹ Vaccine coverage: SD County = 67.6% fully vaccinated, 78.8% 1+ dose vaccinated (as reported on 7/14/21)

² Cases per 100K (7-day average): SD County = 2.5 (as reported on 7/14/21)

Our high local vaccine coverage is an added layer of protection, in addition to the variety of effective virus prevention strategies noted above. The CDC guidance of June 9 states that “[v]accination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.”

The CDPH guidance of July 12 similarly states that “COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for all eligible people in California, including teachers, staff, students, and adults sharing homes with these members of our K-12 communities.”

The option to go maskless in schools if fully vaccinated will be a high-leverage incentive for those who have not yet made the decision to get the vaccine, and will encourage greater vaccination rates in children as soon as the vaccine is made available to the under-12 age group. While it is understood that those under 12 must wear masks indoors in most settings at this time based on current CDPH guidance (as they are not currently eligible to be vaccinated), it is hoped that as soon as the vaccine is available for all ages that the option to go without face coverings indoors will also be extended to all ages based on vaccination status.

As reported this week, only nine states are requiring universal masking in schools, regardless of vaccination status, making California’s rules among the most restrictive in the nation. We urge you to join the majority of other states in allowing local jurisdictions to review local data and respond appropriately.

Please allow our county public health officer the latitude to enforce the CDC’s July 9, 2021 guidance for face coverings (requiring only unvaccinated individuals to wear a face covering in schools) after careful review of local levels of community transmission and local vaccine coverage.

Thank you for prioritizing the needs of our students and their families as we continue to navigate the global pandemic. We appreciate the hard work and commitment of you and your teams.

Sincerely,



Dr. Ben Churchill
Superintendent
Carlsbad Unified School District



Dr. Marian Phelps
Superintendent
Poway Unified School District



Dr. Matt Doyle
Superintendent
Vista Unified School District

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