

Open letter to San Diego Unified School District Board of Education:

Public health is not a choice.

San Diegans for Safe Schools (SDSS) is sounding the alarm in the second largest district in California and eighth largest in the US as COVID-19 cases in our community are continuing to surge. As a County, we are now very close to hitting and then eclipsing what was our highest peak during the 2020-2021 academic year; and schools have not yet opened their doors in SDUSD.

The old assumptions about children and children not driving community spread were based on the original strain of this virus; however, with the more contagious variant known as Delta, we are going to see that children and schools do become more of a focal point of spread. For this reason, we are seeing places like the [UK](#) as well as [local schools](#) delay the start of the school year. The move is due to the rapid spread of the Delta coronavirus variant, which is more transmissible, associated with lower vaccine effectiveness against mild disease and has caused more hospitalisations in the unvaccinated. The extra time meant in hopes the vaccine would be made available to the under 12-year-old population.

99% of California is now firmly in what used to be described as the [Purple Tier](#), reflecting widespread infection rates. Case rates of COVID-19 in children ages 0-9 are now [seven times higher](#) than they were at this time last year, and now we have an even more infectious, dangerous variant threatening our unvaccinated children. In just the last month, we've seen a 420% increase in cases in kids, and hospitalization rates have tripled, right as we approach the full reopening of schools in just a couple short weeks. To protect the health of our kids while ensuring that schools can stay open, it is therefore imperative that we urgently take steps to prevent the spread in schools where unvaccinated kids are most vulnerable.

To ensure the safety of students, teachers and staff; SDSS is urgently asking for the following to be implemented district-wide:

1. ***Masking mandates in crowded outdoor settings and activities, as Los Angeles and San Jose Unified School Districts have already done. ****
2. ***Social distancing during lunch as many districts have mandated in CA and elsewhere. *****
3. ***Access to universal testing at each school across the district at least once a week. ******
4. ***Virtual Academy sign-up extended to 8/25/2021 *******

Throughout the pandemic, SDUSD has followed the science and listened to the experts in order to keep our students, teachers and community at large safe. We know that testing, vaccination, ventilation, cleaning, social distancing and masking have all worked well, which proves the need to continue following expert guidance. SDSS is simply asking for SDUSD to keep focused on best practices as we are so close to vaccine approval for our under 12-year-old population.

*The Los Angeles and San Jose Unified School Districts have **mandated masks for both indoors and outdoors**. This aligns with [CDC's](#) recommendation that people who are not from the same households should [mask](#) if within six feet of each other while outdoors. Over the summer there have been outdoor [camps](#) across the country where significant outbreaks have occurred and spread to the broader community.

**Delta, the current predominant variant, is three times more transmissible than the original strain, posing a much more significant risk of infection for close contact. There have been documented cases of [transmission occurring within seconds](#), rendering our previous guidelines of six feet for 15-minutes inadequate for preventing transmission. Removing masks to eat lunch; therefore, presents a dangerous situation. Site-specific plans are necessary to provide sufficient spacing outdoors along with adequate supervision to keep students safely distanced. Eating indoors should be avoided and staggered lunches should be considered..

***By providing on-site testing, families will equally have access to weekly COVID testing. [LAUSD](#) will be **REQUIRING ALL students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, to undergo initial AND weekly testing for COVID-19**. While mandated weekly testing is more ideal considering the state funds this service to our schools, at the very least, access to weekly testing is imperative to preventing the spread of the virus. Combined with masks, this is the best defense we have to keep students and staff safe and schools open--especially since we know that many people who spread COVID-19 are asymptomatic.

****Given this ever-changing pandemic, the cutoff date of 08/20/2021 for families to decide on enrollment into Virtual Academy is premature. We understand the need for preparations prior to the start of school; therefore, we are asking for an extension to 8/25/2021 in order to give SDUSD families a bit more time to decide as case rates continue to surge in our community.

SDUSD Families want to feel that sending their children to school is not only safe, but the right decision. SDSS urges the SDUSD Board of Education to implement these stringent safety measures prior to the start of school at the end of this month.

Respectfully,
San Diegans for Safe Schools

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