



Placer County Office of Education

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Gayle Garbolino-Mojica, County Superintendent of Schools

November 18, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sent via Electronic Mail

RE: COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate and Safety for K-12 Schools

Dear Governor Newsom,

As County Superintendent of Schools and superintendents of 15 school districts in Placer County representing more than 75,000 students and nearly 15,000 school employees, we have served our communities through each challenging stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Placer schools were among the first in the State to return to in-person instruction while implementing mandates and guidance from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Together with Placer County Public Health, we have worked collaboratively for nearly two years – relentlessly focused on keeping our schools open while prioritizing health and safety. As a result, COVID-19 transmission remains low in school environments, and students have been in classrooms since fall 2020.

Recently, your office issued a press release announcing that CDPH would require a COVID-19 vaccination for all K-12 students once the vaccine is fully approved by the Federal Food & Drug Administration (FDA). At this time, we are aware this mandate may go into effect as early as July 2022 and currently allows for medical and personal belief exemptions.

While we recognize our legal responsibility to comply with State laws, mandates, and CDPH guidance, we also recognize the challenges these mandates create at schools and in our broader communities. Many families throughout Placer County have expressed concerns over the continuance of mask mandates, and the introduction of the vaccination mandate has created additional concerns. We have received hundreds of emails and have heard many hours of public comment from concerned parents. They are voicing their request for a choice and their plans to withdraw their children from public school. In listening to our communities, we anticipate the implementation of a vaccination mandate without exemptions for medical and personal beliefs will deeply impact schools. Families will choose to leave traditional in-person classroom instruction, which provides the best opportunities for academic and social-emotional outcomes for independent study programs or other alternatives to classroom-based instruction.

From the very beginning of the pandemic response, State regulations have been mandated, placing much of the burden for communication, implementation, and enforcement entirely on school site principals, teachers, staff, administrators, and local school boards. With the responsibility to implement these mandates, school boards and administrators are left to manage the real frustrations - and sometimes hostile interactions - of large portions of our public, taking time and focus away from our critical mission of educating students and supporting teachers and staff. The resulting divisions within our communities are eroding the trust and partnerships that have taken years, sometimes decades, to build.

We presume the State intends to create a supportive structure for public schools; therefore, we are requesting more be done during this challenging time to support our work of educating children and youth with the following:

1. It is critical to engage the public transparently and coherently by clearly reinforcing that the authority over these mandates lies with the State and clearly informing the public how they can engage with the correct decision-makers in these matters.
2. In addition, we request the State identify what benchmarks must be met to end universal masking in classrooms.
3. Furthermore, the creation and implementation of COVID-19 safety guidelines, including guidelines for masks, quarantines, and the establishment of normal classroom instruction, must be tailored to local conditions. County Public Health Directors should be provided the authority to adjust all CDPH guidance and mandates to fit local conditions.
4. It is vital that the State maintain medical and personal belief exemptions regarding the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for K-12 students. It is essential to honor the voices and decisions of our parents and families.
5. Finally, California school districts already struggle to find qualified employees for both certificated and classified positions; therefore, we request the option to continue COVID-19 testing in lieu of mandatory vaccination for staff and school employees for the foreseeable future.

In Placer County, we believe in the importance of safe, in-person instruction for our students. We are asking for your support to allow us to return to the business of educating students in the safest and most normal way. Our students, educators, and families need your support.

Yours in education,

Gayle Garbolino-Mojica, Placer County Superintendent of Schools

Kristin Wells, Superintendent, Ackerman Charter School

Karen Mix, Superintendent, Alta-Dutch Flat

Amber Lee-Alva, Superintendent, Auburn Union School District

John Baggett, Superintendent, Colfax Elementary School District

Brad Tooker, Ed.D., Superintendent, Dry Creek Joint Elementary School District

Tom Janis, Superintendent, Eureka Union School District

Jack Kraemer, Superintendent, Foresthill Union School District

Gordon Medd, Superintendent, Loomis Union School District
Denny Rush, Superintendent, Newcastle Elementary School District
Julie Resendez, Superintendent, Placer Hills Union School District
George Sziraki, Ed.D., Superintendent, Placer Union High School District
John Becker, Superintendent, Roseville Joint Union High School District
Roger Stock, Superintendent, Rocklin Unified School District
Derk Garcia, Superintendent, Roseville City School District
Kerry Callahan, Superintendent, Western Placer Unified School District

cc:

California Department of Public Health
California Senator Brian Dahle
California Senator Jim Nielsen
California Assemblymember Megan Dahle
California Assemblymember Frank Bigelow
California Assemblymember Kevin Kiley
Placer County Board of Supervisors
Placer County Public Health
Placer County School District Board Presidents
