March 22, 2022

Senator Dr. Richard Pan, Chair
Senate Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 4070
Sacramento, CA 95815

Senator Connie Leyva, Chair
Senate Education Committee
State Capitol, Room 2083
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 871 (Pan) Public Health: Immunizations

Dear Senators,

Placer County is home to nearly 75,000 students and approximately 15,000 school employees. We have served our school communities through each challenging stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and were among the first in the State to reopen for in-person instruction. Our vaccination rates outpace the state with nearly 45.6 percent of 5-11-year-olds receiving at least one COVID-19 dose compared to only 38.2 percent statewide. We know all too well the importance of public health while keeping students in our classrooms learning.

On behalf of the Placer County Superintendent of Schools and the Placer County Board of Education, we are united in our opposition to Senate Bill 871 (Pan) Public Health: Immunizations which would require every public or private elementary or secondary school, childcare center, day nursery, nursery school, family day care home or development center to require the COVID-19 vaccination with no option for personal belief exemptions. While we recognize our shared responsibility for public health and community safety, we also recognize the challenges this bill would create at schools and in our broader communities.

SB 871 leaves school leaders with more questions than answers and creates unnecessary challenges. From an implementation standpoint, SB 871 fails to address key concerns including:

1. SB 871 does not define “fully immunized against COVID-19.”
The bill does not define what “fully vaccinated” is. Will students be required to receive just the first two initial doses or will subsequent annual booster immunizations also be required? Will the second dose need to be administered within 45 days of receiving the first in order to be considered “fully vaccinated?”

2. **SB 871 fails to reconcile the timing of immunizations with pupil admittance.**

   Under existing law, required immunizations are mandated before the pupil’s first admittance to the institution with additional boosters required upon entrance/advancement to the 7th grade. This schedule aligns with the traditional schedule for youth vaccinations. If a student receives the first dose upon admittance to school, but does not receive the second dose until 7th grade will this be acceptable?

   Will school leaders now be required to verify vaccination status more frequently? If booster immunizations are recommended at least once per year, will school leaders also need to verify vaccination status annually? With existing and severe staff shortages, school administrators do not have the manpower, infrastructure, or capacity to document and monitor thousands of new vaccination verifications on an annual basis.

   Additionally, considering efforts in California already underway to make universal pre-k accessible to all students, it is likely that a student would begin school at 4-years-old and not yet be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Would that student be denied in-person instruction during that time?

3. **SB 871 does not address the changing nature of the multiple variants of the disease.**

   Multiple variants have come and gone over the course of the pandemic, each with its own unique characteristics. The current variant has similar characteristics of the seasonal flu in how it is spread and mutates. If a new strain emerges, will students be required to get yet another vaccine with more boosters to follow? Schools and students will not be able to keep up with the rapid changes. Requiring annual vaccinations verifications to attend in-person instruction is both impractical and ineffective.

4. **SB 871 fails to honor the voices and decisions of parents and families.**
We anticipate that the implementation of SB 871 without exemptions for both medical and personal beliefs will deeply impact schools. Families may 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. A move to require the COVID-19 vaccine without a personal belief exemption could result in further inequities in educational opportunities and learning experiences and could lead to countless students being excluded from in-person instruction.

In Placer County, we believe in the importance of safe, in-person instruction for our students. SB 871 interferes with our local school districts’ obligation to provide a safe and emotionally supportive in-person education for all students. As we return to the business of educating students, we urge you to oppose SB 871.

Yours in education,

[Signature]
Gayle Garbolino-Mojica
Placer County Superintendent of Schools

[Signature]
Kelli Gnile
President, Placer County Board of Education

cc: Dr. Tomas Aragon, California Department of Public Health
Senate Heath Committee Members
Senate Education Committee Members
California Senator Brian Dahle
California Senator Jim Nielsen
California Assemblymember Megan Dahle
California Assemblymember Frank Bigelow
California Assemblymember Kevin Kiley
Placer County School District Board Presidents