

REACH Academy: Forcing Staggered Start Times

By Megan Bumpus

In the midst of all the things going on right now, my school community really came through today to do what worked for us. Not everyone was enthusiastic about doing a “sick out” today for multiple reasons, so we needed to figure something else out on our own. **As of today (Jan 18), we have SEVENTY students of about 400 who have tested positive for Covid since we got back from winter break. All SEVENTEEN classrooms are on “modified quarantine,” meaning they have at least one positive case.** Before the County and State removed the threshold for sending a class into at-home quarantine (3 positive cases in one class), 13 of our classes would have been doing ten days of distance learning by now to stop the spread. One of our teachers has SEVEN kindergartners out with Covid as of today.

For us, the most important thing today was to get kids tested. Our support staff HUSTLED after break to get consent for opt-in weekly “pooled” PCR testing for 99% of our families. We weren’t willing to give up a testing day for a sick out, but we weren’t willing to let kids in the building per OUSD’s protocols either while they waited to be tested. **Our teachers got together and forced a staggered arrival time on our administration, resulting in folks having to collaborate to make it work.** We have a dope team. The organizing that my colleagues did to create & implement a plan to test all students before they enter the building and communicate that to families made me proud. This was an unauthorized teacher-led action, so we had push-back from multiple angles, and apparently our Network Superintendent almost shut our school down for the day. Not only did school stay open, but **staff worked together and refused to continue letting Covid spread in our cafeteria and classrooms. Today we put our foot down and caught 9 more positive student cases before the kids could enter the school.**

Honestly, it went very smoothly, but that’s because some folks put in too much work, including our Safety Lead, teacher leaders, and principal. We can’t sustain this as-is, so we’ll be going to the next level and pushing for regular resources to support this shift for our site until our positive case rate goes down. Most families followed our suggested schedule, bringing their kids at different morning times based on grade level so the students wouldn’t all be outside at once. Some kids showed up early and did activities outside with their teachers. **100% of students on campus were tested outside before we opened the doors, and the relief that we felt when we walked inside was almost overwhelming.** Three staff from OUSD’s central office came to support with logistics, and somehow we also had an extra Covid tester there. We borrowed tables from the school we share a campus with. Everyone was kept in the loop. And it worked.

Why do we have to break rules and protocols that don’t make sense for our schools? If we had been included in creating the protocols, so many things would function more smoothly. I don’t care how much money people are getting paid to make these district-wide decisions on Covid protocols, there ain’t nothin like the day-to-day experience that we bring to this. Nobody in a school district is prepared to run Covid testing and manage these other things. that’s not the work that we do, under

normal circumstances. So **we should be having conversations with each other and planning together instead of them telling us what to do and having that not work for our communities. After today, there is NO WAY we're going back to a situation in which we are told we must let students into our school first and test them later.** We can do better, and our small elementary school in deep east Oakland just proved it.