

5 July 2020

Dear Polly and Members of the FUHSD Board:

Recently, the FUHSD community received a letter from the district emphasizing the state's language that "schools should offer in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible" this coming fall. As the district moves forward with plans to reopen school in August, we, on behalf of many FUHSD Certificated staff, want to express deep concerns regarding offering in-person instruction. We love what we do, want to be back in our classroom in front of our students, and would certainly choose in-person instruction over remote school any day -- ***but only when it is clearly safe to do so and when we are not being asked to risk our lives or the lives of our students in order to be back on FUHSD campuses.***

While we understand the importance of honoring [the new guidelines issued](#) from the Santa Clara Department of County Health, we detail below how other districts in our county have responded with an approach that mutually prioritizes health, safety, and learning needs. We ask that FUHSD stand on the side of saving lives and continue with remote learning in the fall. Based on current data and efforts to contain COVID-19 in our county, we know there is not a feasible way to maintain adequate health, safety, and value of in-person learning for students or staff, so ***we must invest our time and energy into building a robust digital learning experience that allows us to best uphold our dedication to safety for all students and staff members across the district.***

Below, we outline a range of concerns collected from certificated staff members about the issue of returning to campuses in person, including as part of a hybrid approach; we also touch upon various teaching and learning issues we've experienced and reflected upon for both distance and in-person instruction models. We ask for your patience and thoroughness in addressing these concerns fully before asking FUHSD teachers to return to campuses for in-person instruction in August.

1. CONCERNS AROUND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF STAFF / STUDENTS WITH

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNTY GUIDELINES: *The current plan asks us to add a new level of responsibility to our jobs by maintaining specific, nuanced sanitation and hygiene standards on campuses in addition to our other imperative mandate to provide high quality instruction. Please consider the following concerns and questions that accompany these new health and safety expectations.*

- a. Opening In Person Too Early:** We already know that multiple schools / districts¹ that have opened without proper systems, plans, and resources in place to offer

¹ In New York: [75 school staff members died of COVID-19](#), including [a 36-year-old principal](#). In Oregon, in June, [cases in children under 10 jumped from 58 to 319](#). In Texas, Dallas allowed daycares to take children of non-essential workers and [their cases amongst children and adults also surged](#).

comprehensive health protections have faced major repercussions. We also know anecdotally that surviving COVID-19 sometimes has long term health implications according to sources including [SF Gate](#) and [The Atlantic](#).

- b. **COVID Contraction / Exposure:** How will all students and staff be screened for symptoms each day? There is growing evidence that screening methods don't mitigate transmission risk from asymptomatic or presymptomatic carriers. Given this, how will we keep students who are asymptomatic or presymptomatic carriers from attending school?
- c. **High Risk Households of Essential Workers:** How do we monitor and track students living in households with those working essential, high contact jobs (with increased risk of viral transmission) without creating stigmas or other socio-emotional impacts?
- d. **Ventilation and Air Safety Concerns:** We know that the virus spreads primarily through air droplets from speaking, sneezing, and coughing and that infection is created by exposure to the virus over time, so people in enclosed spaces for long periods of time are at high risk of contracting COVID-19. The lack of adequate ventilation in our buildings paired with these two factors creates even higher risks of exposure and spread in our classrooms. How will this be addressed?
- e. **Classroom Cleaning:** Who will be liable for ensuring germs aren't spread? How, when, by whom, and with what frequency will classrooms be cleaned? How will the schedule incorporate non-instructional time for cleaning? Who will pay for the thousands of wipes, hand sanitizer bottles, and other resources needed to ensure proper hygiene and sanitation?
- f. **Mask Compliance:** What will happen if a student does not or cannot comply with mask wearing requirements? Given that the county guidelines direct teachers to not exclude students from the classroom if they fail to wear a mask, what and how will consequences be applied, and by whom?
- g. **Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** According to California Superintendent of Education Tony Thurmond, schools are unable to open without proper PPE. This would include masks, gloves, and protective clothing -- all of which are already in short supply and high demand in medical facilities. How will FUHSD guarantee provision of PPE for staff to wear at all times when working with students? What PPE will students be provided, particularly if they cannot afford their own?
- h. **Handwashing:** How will we ensure students have access to handwashing stations and are actually washing their hands in accordance with expected health standards?
- i. **Contact Tracing:** Given that most sites are currently too small to allow enforcement of six-foot social distancing guidelines, how will the district provide

ongoing contact tracing of students and staff? Will there be a point person at each site to track that information?

- j. **Restrooms:** How will staff and student bathrooms be sanitized so the virus doesn't spread ([given bathrooms can be a hotspot for COVID](#))? Sometimes 50+ staff share the same single-room bathroom that lacks hot running water. For multi-stall bathrooms, who will monitor them to enforce social distancing?
- k. **Possessions and Shared Objects:** How will teachers be expected to enforce backpack and other personal possession distancing for students? Who will be responsible for disinfecting shared objects such as chromebooks, or will students each be expected to bring a personal computer to school? This is a potential equity concern.
- l. **Enforcement of Social Distancing Rules:**
 - i. Inside Classrooms: How are teachers expected to enforce student social distancing in classrooms & provide consequences when guidelines aren't met? Many classrooms aren't big enough to have six feet between desks, barriers will require sanitation and monitoring, and ventilation in our rooms still poses issues even with spacing and barriers in place. Having to monitor social distancing on this scale will disrupt our ability to engage with our instructional responsibilities and with our students.
 - ii. Outside Classrooms: Who will be expected to enforce social distancing during passing periods, breaks, and meals? How will social distancing be enforced when students remove masks in order to eat?

2. CONCERNS FOR QUALITY OF IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION UNDER THESE

GUIDELINES: The push for returning to schools is largely based on AAP's (American Academy of Pediatrics) position that in-school learning is fundamental to a child and adolescent's well-being and development--primarily because of access to academic instruction, social and emotional interaction, therapy and special services, and opportunities for physical activity.

However, in-person learning with CDC health guidelines would erase many of those socio-emotional benefits the AAP is pushing for.

- The AAP's recommendation fails to recognize that parents can create the needed opportunities of social interaction, physical activity, and therapy through the creation of social bubbles in their community.
- Attempting to "do school" under CDC guidelines will greatly restrict the way teachers normally foster in-person learning and interaction.

As argued by [Joshua Wede, a Penn State psychology professor](#), it is not possible to maintain a meaningful level of human interaction when students are wearing masks, sitting at least six feet apart, and facing straight ahead: "The value that you have in the classroom is totally lost." We fully agree with this sentiment and offer a variety of examples, pulled from our own teaching experiences and observations, that speak to why in-person instruction during this pandemic will NOT be more effective for students than a robust distance learning approach can be:

- a. **Disruptions to Group Learning & Interactive Instruction:** Most group activities that mark the quality of in-person instruction are off the table with these guidelines. It's hard to imagine in-person school producing engaging learning without:
- Discussion tools, including many we've learned about through district-sponsored PD, such as Socratic seminars, 4 corners, Think/Pair/Share, group warmups / debriefs / primers of any kind, gallery walks, swirling donuts
 - Use of table groups or teams of any kind
 - Sharing of ANY equipment or supplies between student, including: chromebooks, flash cards, handouts, writing utensils, annotation tools, art supplies, calculators, whiteboards, manipulatives, textbooks, novels, reading packets, scripts, test tubes, lab kits, visual aids, food, theatre props, costumes, choir dresses, band uniforms and athletic equipment.
- b. **Disruptions to Speaking and Listening Skill Practice:** In addition to the evolving understanding, increased risk, and health concerns around [respiratory and aerosol droplets](#) when talking or singing indoors, we have concerns around:
- Students' ability to engage meaningfully in discussions, conversational skills, language practice, etc. in all subject areas / classes
 - Teachers' ability to clearly communicate information, expectations, feedback, & instructions in all subject areas / classes
 - Students' ability to engage in singing and instrumental practice in Choir and Band
 - Students with hearing impairments who rely on lip reading for effective communication
- c. **Lack of Feasibility of Supplying Safe Access to Necessary Learning Materials:** Assembly of individual materials for students and ensuring those materials aren't shared is a major concern. The financial and teacher time costs to maintain appropriate systems under the guidelines will easily become a financial and logistical burden on the district.
- d. **Disruption to Teachers' Provision of Individual Support for Students:** How will we guarantee students' physical and emotional safety when teachers and support staff under current guidelines will have an inability to use physical proximity to
- Check student work
 - Check in with students academically or emotionally
 - Assess whether a student is under the influence
 - Respectfully address student questions, misbehavior, or concerns

3. WELLNESS CONCERNS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: Beyond the obvious health / exposure risks created for a teachers interacting -- even using PPE -- with over 100 students each week, an in-person or hybrid model could also severely impact the wellness of students and staff in less obvious but equally important ways.

- Under a hybrid model, the workload for teachers would more than double. Instead of focusing on delivering just ONE high quality experience for all students at once, teachers must plan for two effective experiences (online and in-person) for split cohorts within that same class--essentially teaching more "periods" a week.

- The emotional and curricular strain on students is affected and doubles as well in this scenario. Students have already experienced trauma and upheaval this year and have only recently become adjusted to online school. A return to in-person learning before it is safe would likely exacerbate that trauma for many, if not most students, particularly if we cannot guarantee that schools will stay open in person permanently. Our additional concerns are for a school environment which must use teachers as hygiene police to enforce masks, barriers, and social distancing. We don't understand how that model would lead to great learning outcomes for students, especially when classrooms can function at near typical communication capacity over platforms such as Zoom.
- For some teachers, the return to in-person classes would drastically limit or eliminate the possibility of engaging with high-risk, household & non-household family members (elderly parents, nieces and nephews, siblings, etc.) This personal expectation on teachers could have drastic consequences for our personal wellness and stress management, family dynamics, and ultimately our short- and long-term capacity to support & teach our students effectively.
- We know that in-person instruction may quickly need to morph to distance learning. Countries like Israel and South Korea reopened schools, when COVID-19 was far more contained, and were ordered to shut down after new cases emerged. This type of unexpected redirecting and readjustment could cause ripples of emotional and physical labor for all in the community, including emotional trauma.

4. CONCERNS AROUND TEACHER RETENTION:

1. **Potential Loss of Lives:** The most significant, obvious potential outcome of sending teachers back for in-person instruction before safety can be guaranteed is that, in the event of outbreaks within our schools, we face the loss of some of our best teachers -- teachers the district has invested years of time and money into to make GREAT -- to the virus itself. The monetary and human cost of that could destroy the learning outcomes, reputation, stability, financial security, public respect, and staff trust in the district not just this year, but for many, many years moving forward.
2. **Potential Loss of Employees:**
 - a. Anyone at or near retirement may opt for early retirement if we try to start in-person school in the fall, especially given the number of comorbidities that plague Americans' health.
 - b. Teachers whose spouses' higher-earning jobs could allow them to stay at home may leave the profession temporarily or long-term rather than take on the health risks expected of them as teachers.
 - c. Teachers pregnant or hoping to get pregnant may leave temporarily or long-term rather than take on the health risks expected of them as teachers.
 - d. Teachers already considering leaving the district for any number of reasons may take this as an opportunity to move to other areas where teachers are not being asked to risk their lives by returning to in-person instruction.
3. **Potential Subbing Issues:** Our existing sub pool includes a very large number of district retirees and older individuals in the high-risk categories & is unlikely to be able to

adequately support a return to in-person classes. More absences will likely occur if we go back to school in person as teachers quarantine or care for their own and their family members' health, & members of our already too-small sub pool may not want to take jobs at all due to health concerns. We would like to know what plan administration has for handling sub coverage during the pandemic, and specifically how subbing will happen *without* relying on in-house coverage by teachers.

5. INVESTING IN A ROBUST REMOTE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: *It is clear that under COVID-19 health guidelines, in-person teaching would result in a low quality and fraught in-school experience. With a month left before the fall semester begins, let's put our energy into keeping students and teachers safe and making sure they feel connected to their online learning environments.*

- The district should continue providing the technology needed by all students -- such as wifi access/devices, laptops, use of platforms like Zoom, etc. -- that will allow them to maintain access to all digital learning resources and materials prepared by their teachers
- We should utilize teacher wisdom and experience gained from multiple months of online teaching practice, piloting of remote models in Summer Academy, and widespread access to and use of platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, and Schoology throughout the district to help us continue to prepare and deliver robust remote instruction.
- We should reimagine the ways we consider equity and access at this time and recognize that some of the biggest barriers to schooling for many of our students are drastically changed in positive ways in a distance learning model; in working with our students for the past many months, many of us have seen the remote learning environment actually close some equity gaps for students and improve aspects of engagement / well-being among: students who have responsibilities at home, students who must work outside the home, students who face transportation barriers getting to school, and students with needs that make in-person learning challenging.

6. OTHER RESPONSES TO THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY HEALTH ORDER: *While FUHSD's response to the recent county order emphasized the fact that schools should "offer in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible," other districts in the same county, in response to the same order, prioritized health, safety, and learning needs by committing to creating a robust remote instruction experience for students. We ask the district/board to stand with [Palo Alto Unified](#), [Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District](#), and [Eastside Union High School District](#) by adopting a distance learning model.*

7. OUR NEEDS

In order for staff and students to safely return to school, we would like to see the following:

- 14 days with no new cases in the county before we consider going back to face-to-face instruction.²

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>
<https://www.iwatch.org/na51083/2020/03/13/covid-19-incubation-period-update>
<https://medium.com/@harley.litzelman/teachers-refuse-to-return-to-campus-b9afa039ef2e>

- A Legal Risk Assessment Document:
 - -document must include key decision points on concerns listed above
 - -must include key decision points that will determine thinking around:
 - 1) the numbers of people (how many children and adults can be in one space at one time, with the time period of exposure risk factored in
 - 2) Age and comorbidities against the backdrop of diagnosed COVID cases that will determine the timing of the next closure should we open or be blended ==must provide the RO (R-naught)
 - 3) HR chart and timeline to support employees decision-making process about reducing their schedule, leave of absence, or protections and agreements in place for high risk employees

We do recognize that at some point it may seem too fiscally and logistically impossible to do what we are stating is necessary to make us and our students feel safe. In that case, we request that if what we're seeking here truly isn't in the scope of what the district can provide, then you acknowledge that distance learning is the best option at this time and allow us all to use the remaining time we have before the year begins to prepare for that reality.

Our staff members and students deserve stable communities and high quality academic interaction without life-or-death fear and unnecessary traumatic reconfiguring of the currently unsafe in-person classroom environment. It breaks our hearts to be unable to create what we have traditionally been able to in our physical classroom spaces, but we also know that we can still create community digitally and support all of our students on the path to high levels of learning in the coming year.

We love this district, we love our students, we love what we do, and we have worked hard to build professional relationships and lives in this community, so it is our fervent hope that it won't take unnecessary illness, exposure, or death to convince you to collectively make decisions that will keep our community safe and engaged in meaningful learning together.

Sincerely,

[These teachers and staff members of FUHSD](#)

If you would like to DIGITALLY SIGN this letter before it is sent to Polly & the Board, please follow [this link](#) and add your name and title to the GoogleForm. To see who has signed the letter, click on "These teachers and staff members of FUHSD" above to see all signatures.
