

San Diego educators want a safe, science- based school reopening.



Dec. 9, 2020

In August, SDEA consulted with a panel of experts from University of California, San Diego on how to safely reopen schools. That panel issued a report and recommendations. In October, 43% of 6,500 SDEA members participated in a survey on reopening schools. Then in November and December, SDEA members participated in online, school-based input meetings on reopening protections. Based on all three sources, San Diego Education Association members say...

This is what it will take for a safe school reopening:

1. The right public health indicators

San Diego needs to not just be out of the purple tier, but must have low spread and case rates for at least two weeks. In addition, child care -- also a public health issue -- must be sufficiently available in the community in order to allow school staff to return to campuses.†‡

2. Widely available testing with rapidly reported results and tracing of positive cases within our schools

- RNA/PCR tests must be available to all symptomatic members of a school community and results must be rapidly reported.*†‡ A program of surveillance testing of asymptomatic school staff and students is necessary to catch cases before there is an outbreak.*‡
- Contact tracing within schools must be able to effectively manage spread by quickly initiating an investigation and implementing a response.†‡

3. A phased in approach

Phase One of San Diego Unified reopening began on Oct. 13, 2020 with on-site, appointment-based instruction for struggling students. Further reopening requires:

- A phased-in approach starting with several schools within any cluster, with elementary before secondary*;
- Health and safety compliance in each preceding phase is assessed and reported*;
- And cannot begin before flu season peaks in Jan./Feb. 2021.†

4. Reducing the number of students on campus each day to reduce exposure

Phased reopening must include measures that have the effect of reducing the number of students on campus and in the classroom each day.† This may be achieved by offering an

*Summary Report and Recommendations; UCSD Expert Scientific Panel (Covid-19) for San Diego Unified School District; August 9, 2020

†San Diego Education Association Member Survey, Oct. 21-26, 2020

‡San Diego Education Association Member Bargaining Input Sessions, Nov. 5 - Dec. 2, 2020

online or on-site program, and/or a staggered daily on-site schedule (i.e. Student group A in school on Weekdays 1 and 2, and Group B in school on Weekdays 4 and 5). But reduced exposure is not achieved by AM/PM-split schedules.‡ Social distancing is necessary*, and class size must be small enough to allow for it.†‡

5. Continued online learning for high-risk students and educators

To save lives, there must be a continued online-only learning program for any student or educator at high-risk of severe illness from Covid-19*†‡, any student who cannot wear a mask because they are developmentally under age 2 years or who has a condition that is not amenable to a mask-wearing education goal.*

6. An effective educational program

Teachers cannot effectively teach students in the classroom while simultaneously teaching another group of students online. The educational program must be designed so teachers are giving attention to students in class, or students online, but not attempting to do both at the same time.†‡ The education program cannot further add to the strain and workload on educators.‡

7. A plan to handle at-school illness, which must include a nurse at every school

Before educators and students return to school campuses, there needs to be a solid plan in place for how to handle illness as it arises at school and in the school community†‡ That plan must include, among many other elements:

- A full-time school nurse at every school to triage staff and students who become ill at school†‡;
- Triggers for individual school closure that are more sensitive than California standards, and that depend on multiple factors including adherence to precautionary measures (e.g. masks, social distancing, ventilation), the level of infection, contact tracing, and testing capacity in each schools area*;
- Paid Covid-19 leave for staff that must quarantine due to exposure or infection.†‡

8. Increased ventilation to prevent transmission

A plan and resources must be in place for relocating learning outside whenever possible.* Each classroom and workspace must be evaluated for its ventilation status*†‡, and have MERV 13 or higher HVAC filters installed or be equipped with portable air cleaners.*†‡ High-risk classes like Physical Education, Choir, and Band must be relocated outdoors.‡

9. Basic and common measures to prevent transmission

There are preventative measures that have become common during the pandemic that the District must have in place and must be adhered to, including: masks, full PPE for staff exposed to bodily fluids, social distancing, hand sanitizing supplies and stations, reducing occupant capacity of rooms, additional staff to clean and sanitize classrooms and equipment.*†‡

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