

# California Legislature

December 2, 2020

Dr. Mark Ghaly  
Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency  
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Ghaly:

As the state develops a plan to distribute and administer a COVID-19 vaccine, we believe that the California Health and Human Services Agency and the California Department of Public Health should prioritize the vaccination of K-12 and early education teachers and school staff in order to get our schools reopened when allowed by public health authorities.

The public health impacts this year's school closures are having on children are becoming clearer everyday. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association estimates that this year's learning loss will result in 5.53 million fewer years of life for elementary-school-aged children, cumulatively. Another study, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), found that mental health-related emergency department visits by children increased 44% year-over-year.

The public health data shows a dire situation, but there's also data showing that our school closures are contributing to a widening of the achievement gap. Some parents are able to afford to send their children to private schools that have opened, but the overwhelming majority of our families are trying to make distance learning work. Interim reports from across the state show increasing rates of failure among students, especially those in lower-income neighborhoods. It is obvious that distance learning has been a challenge for many students.

It is our understanding that the state is preparing a phased vaccination schedule with frontline healthcare workers and congregate care residents and employees in the beginning phase. **The state should include K-12 and early education teachers and critical school staff in the following phase, consistent with preliminary recommendations from the CDC.**

The picture painted by both the public health data and the student progress report data show why it is imperative to prioritize the reopening of our schools within the state's pandemic response. Getting our state's teachers and school staff vaccinated early would allow school

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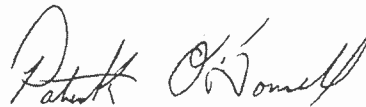
districts to reopen faster and enable our students to return to a workable learning environment.

Our state's children cannot afford to wait. This is too important to overlook or sweep aside – we must prioritize the reopening of our schools and develop a vaccine schedule that effectively applies that priority.

Sincerely,



Assemblymember Jordan Cunningham  
Assembly District 35



Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell  
Assembly District 70  
Chair, Assembly Education Committee