

December 10, 2020

To: Orange County superintendents and local school boards

From: Local Orange County chapter presidents

Re: Current tier status and school safety

While Orange County remains in the Purple Tier (the highest risk), Orange County teachers' association presidents strongly recommend that all schools use distance learning until the county COVID-19 infection rates recede and stabilize.

Currently, the school districts in our county follow different policies and rely on voluntary virus reporting. Without consistently applied testing and tracing, our schools risk spreading infection throughout the county. No district is completely independent of the others; we have members and families working, living, and learning in different cities. Regardless of where we work or live or learn, no one in our county is dispensable.

Current COVID-19 projections support our position; [Orange County's positivity rate is now 10.6%](#), and the daily case numbers (48/100,000) are more than four times the threshold that pushed the county into the purple tier weeks ago. And these numbers do not reflect the anticipated spike resulting from last week's holiday gatherings.

[Hospitalizations in California due to confirmed or suspected cases of the coronavirus have risen more than 81% in the last two weeks, and ICU hospitalizations have increased 57.1%](#), according to Dr. Mark Ghaly, secretary of California's Health and Human Services Agency. By shifting instruction to distance learning, we can help flatten the curve before the rate of infection spikes beyond the capacity of hospitals and healthcare providers.

[Over one million young people have contracted the virus in the U.S.](#) The numbers dramatically increased in the beginning of November and have continued to climb at an alarming rate with no plateau in sight. As of December 7, [in California](#) alone, 126,430 children aged 5-17 have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Distance learning, while necessary, has been exhausting and difficult for both students and teachers. There's nothing educators want more than to teach and interact with their students in person. But now is not that time.

Our number one priority is the safety of our students, colleagues, and communities. Distance learning is the best way to achieve that safety. To that end, we must ensure that OC students are distance learning until county COVID-19 projections indicate a reduction in the rate of infection.

In unity,

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