



AFL-CIO

California School Employees Association

3350 Scott Blvd.
Building 18
Santa Clara, CA 95054

(408) 261-7990
(800) 487-2440
FAX: (408) 235-8678
www.csea.com

Ben Valdepeña
Association President

Keith Pace
Executive Director

Member of the AFL-CIO

*The nation's largest
independent classified
employee association*



July 17, 2020

Via Electronic Mail Only
daustin@pausd.org

Dr. Don Austin, Superintendent
Palo Alto Unified School District
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94306

RE: School Reopening

Dear Dr. Austin:

We, the CSEA Palo Alto Chapter 301 Executive Board and Negotiations Team, are writing in support of the [open letter submitted by PAEA on July 13, 2020](#). We thank PAEA for their support of the letter we are submitting today.

We are honored to work side by side with our amazing teachers, administrators, leadership team, and Board. We are proud to be educators and essential staff who help our student's achieve academic success; provide a safe, clean, well-maintained and welcoming learning environment; and support their physical, social, emotional and mental well-being. We share the many concerns that were voiced by our colleagues, the teachers of PAUSD, and add our voices to ask for adopting a distance learning model, and maintaining this distance learning model until it is safe to return to schools, and we are adequately prepared for a safe return so we can protect our students, staff and community during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

We all would like to return to school and work with and support our students in person. However, it is simply not safe at this point in time to do so. "COVID-19 continues ... to pose a severe risk to residents of our County, and significant safety measures are necessary to protect against a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths. This Order requires risk reduction measures to be in place across all business sectors and activities, ensuring necessary precautions are followed as we adapt the way we live and function in light of the ongoing threat that the virus poses." ([July 2, 2020 Santa Clara County Public Health Department Order](#)) [summary](#), [full version](#)

The focus up to now on reopening plans has been on academic planning, bell schedules, school calendars and negotiations with teachers so that families have the information they need to make decisions about in person or distance learning; understandable given our mission of educating children. However, unless we have a plan to keep all employees at school and work sites safe and healthy, we cannot keep students safe, and families cannot make informed decisions about

the risks and assess if it is safe for their children to return to school. **Our working environment = students' learning environment**, and both need to be safe with a clearly laid out plan in place.

The recent surge of Covid-19 cases in our county compels us to reevaluate our reopening plans. We need to focus on planning, coordinating and implementing safety measures now so that we are actually prepared to safely reopen in the future. Currently, we are not adequately prepared to safely reopen.

I. Classified Staff On-Duty Through-out School Closures

Classified staff have been working in person since schools were closed in March. They are right now working in person without an agreement for safe reopening, or a fully developed safety plan or adequate PPE. They would be some of the first employees returning to work if schools were to re-open.

Planning around implementing safety protocols and creating safe work environments has been minimal, as expressed by the superintendent in Board updates and in a message to staff on June 30, 2020 "You will notice the lack of details regarding cleaning, flow of movement, dealing with health conditions, and other safety measures." While the importance of safety measures was noted, it clearly has not been the priority in reopening plans thus far and is still not available in any detail. Despite classified being on site since school closures and doing frontline work, there has been no urgency to address the needs of the vast array of jobs that classified employees do and to adequately ensure their health and safety while performing them.

As early as May, both CSEA and PAEA called for planning around safety to prepare for reopening. As more maintenance and operations employees were called back in person to work, concerns arose around returning them to work safely given that a shelter in place order was still in effect. CSEA sent emails to District leadership raising concerns and proposing solutions on June 19th. We submitted a detailed proposal to the District on June 26th for an MOU around safely reopening schools. July 7th was our first negotiations session and we first received a response proposal from the District on July 9th. Discussions are on-going and both sides are committed to health and safety but the clock is ticking.

The County K-12 reopening guidelines ask for plans and protocols to be created and sites to be adequately equipped to ensure safety of staff and students. This will need time and careful roll out, all the while keeping safety and health top of mind, minimizing the number of people at schools and maximizing remote work. We are woefully behind on the work necessary to meet these requirements. Some efforts that have been undertaken are inadequate as we try and rush to meet safety requirements without the appropriate supplies being available. This results in resources and money being expended unnecessarily for ineffective or less than ideal solutions as we attempt to force a return to work during a surge in Covid-19 cases in our county.

II. Planning for Future Reopening

An action planning template has been available from the County since June 3, 2020 when the Stronger Together guidance was issued. <https://www.sccoe.org/reopening-schools/Documents/Stronger-Together-Recovery-Reopening-School.pdf>. It contains detailed steps to take Now, Before Schools Reopen and When Schools Reopen along with identifying the point person for each area. This should be filled in with point persons identified and made available for our entire school community to access.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eu8Mg0_d0yXs2Fal_iF3zi3El6djFyyosftGkzyNpE4/edit

Having a Covid-19 coordinator (like our Title IX coordinator) would greatly streamline our processes, protocols, and communications and have us all on the same page. It is critical that everyone is following the same guidance across the entire District and that it is clearly communicated. Some site-based variations may be needed such as entrance/exit routes, but overall protocols must be uniform across the District.

The [July 2 variance \(Reducing Risk Ordinance\)](#) requires a lengthy and detailed social distancing protocol form to be filled out and once completed distributed to employees, posted, and submitted to the County for posting on their website.

<https://www.sccgov.org/sites/covid19/Pages/social-distancing-protocol.aspx>

Using a tool such as the CDC decision tree for re-opening would greatly help guide our decision making process, especially when coupled with time to actually carry out the necessary work needed to safely re-open. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Schools-Decision-Tree.pdf>

III. Vulnerabilities of Classified Staff

1. COMPLEX AND VARIED ROLES: There are 125+ job classifications in which classified staff function. Planning for the many complexities of classified roles presents special challenges.

We have staff who cannot work remotely (bus drivers, custodians), staff who work at multiple sites (behaviorists, engagement specialists, maintenance), staff working in multiple classrooms to push in or pull out students (resource aides, OTs), staff who have very high contact with the public (front offices, campus supervisors), staff who can work remotely (tech support, business services), and staff who do not work at school sites (district office, MOT yard).

The wide range of jobs, and the varying abilities of employees to work remotely requires extra safety precautions. It is critical that we both assess the needs of all the different roles that classified play in our district and survey employees to assess for vulnerabilities. Reasonable accommodations need to be made to ensure health and safety so that our classified staff can effectively and safely support our students and school community. Thus far that has not happened.

2. AGE: Overall as a group classified staff has a larger portion of older employees. Age remains a critical risk factor for Covid-19, despite the virus now impacting all ages.

We have ~180 employees who are over the age of 60 and ~30 who are over the age of 70. At this moment, we have employees over the age of 70 working in person at our school sites, including in custodial roles.

The July 2, 2020 County Public Health Order strongly encourages people over the age of 70 to stay at home except for the most essential tasks and suggests that those between the ages of 50-69 limit their interactions with other people; a challenge to accomplish in a school setting.

3. DIVERSITY: Classified employees are an ethnically diverse staff. People of color are at significantly higher risk of contracting Covid-19.

“Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put some members of racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, regardless of age. Among some racial and ethnic minority groups ... evidence points to higher rates of hospitalization or death from COVID-19 than among non-Hispanic white persons. As of June 12, 2020, age-adjusted hospitalization rates are **highest among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic black persons**, followed by Hispanic or Latino persons.

- Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native persons have a rate approximately **5 times** that of non-Hispanic white persons,
- non-Hispanic black persons have a rate approximately **5 times** that of non-Hispanic white persons,
- Hispanic or Latino persons have a rate approximately **4 times** that of non-Hispanic white persons.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

4. ESSENTIAL WORKERS: Classified workers are essential. Many cannot work remotely, many are low wage earners. Representative of these workers are our food service staff who have been heroes throughout the school closures by providing meals to our community despite exposing themselves to greater risk. They continue to do so now through the summer.

“Essential workers who must leave home...are among those contracting the coronavirus.

“ A UC San Francisco [study](#) of thousands of residents and workers in the city’s Mission District found that 57% of those tested must leave their homes for work, and those who had to leave home to work accounted for 90% of the positive cases. [Nearly 89% of those who tested positive](#) earn less than \$50,000 a year, and most live in households with three or more people.”

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-13/two-big-reasons-california-has-struggled-to-control-coronavirus>

Many of these vulnerabilities apply to our students, particularly our lower income and HUR students. These are precisely the students who may need in person support the most. Their family members may also be essential workers and are also at greater risk.

IV. No Palo Alto Bubble – We Are Higher Risk

CDC identified 4 Levels of risk of spreading Covid-19 for when one is thinking about participating in an event or gathering: lowest, more, higher, highest. We are not all from the same local area. Our employees come from around the greater Bay Area and as far away as the Central Valley, amounting to 10+ counties. Our students' parents also work in many different counties. This places us in the higher risk category.

“CDC risk levels

If you are at increased risk for severe illness, consider avoiding high-risk gatherings. The risk of COVID-19 spreading at events and gatherings increases as follows:

Lowest risk: Virtual-only activities, events, and gatherings.

More risk: Smaller outdoor and in-person gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).

Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.

Highest risk: Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

CA Public Health Website”

V. Summary

For all these reasons and the many well-articulated concerns in the PAEA letter of July 13, 2020, we urge you to implement a robust distance learning model for the start of school in August and to undertake a thoughtful, well planned roll out and implementation of the necessary health and safety measures to protect our students, employees and community for when it is safe to return in the future.

We look forward to working together with you to achieve the highest standards of academic excellence, to provide support for the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of our

Dr. Don Austin, Superintendent

July 17, 2020

Page 6

students and staff, and to protect our entire community during this unprecedented crisis of an on-going pandemic and the recent surge in Covid-19 cases.

Respectfully,



Meb Steiner

President CSEA Palo Alto Chapter 301

CSEA Palo Alto Chapter 301 Executive Board

CSEA Palo Alto Chapter 301 Negotiations Team

MS/rg

C: Karen Hendricks, Deputy Superintendent; Members of the PAUSD Board of Education; Patricia Picard, Regional Representative 43; Machel Kessinger, Area C Director; Jerry Fillingim, Labor Relations Representative; Debra Cole, South Bay Field Director; Chapter 301 Contract File