



September 27, 2020

Dear Board of Education Trustees and Superintendent Austin:

The PAEA Executive Board and Negotiations Team are writing to urge the Board of Education and the District to slow down the reopening plan for elementary schools and special education students. We are asking you to reconsider staying in full-distance learning mode until at least January of 2021. One hundred, twenty-seven people spoke at the last board meeting, and an overwhelming majority were not in favor of reopening in-person at this point. Many staff and community questions are still unanswered. The safety measures in the District's plan are not fully implemented. We do not believe that parents truly understood what a hybrid model would look like when they took the first poll about returning to in-person learning. It should also be pointed out that numerous families have said they never received the poll.

When we negotiated the hybrid model, PAEA was under the impression that parents would have made their commitment before school started so our classes would be set. PAEA did not know that so many students and teachers would be moved around after starting the school year because that was not the plan when the agreement was made. In order to reopen safely, we need to satisfy three conditions: low enough infection risk region-wide, a solid district plan and all stakeholders fully prepared to implement that plan. PAUSD is rushing to reopen first when our colleagues in San Jose Unified, Cupertino, and Milpitas Unified committed to full-distance learning until January to keep their students, educators, staff, and community safe. We believe this is a more prudent path to take.

We don't want to be first; we want to be safe!

Instruction:

As stated above, when PAEA negotiated the hybrid schedules, it was with the understanding that the district would be getting commitments from the parents as to which model of instruction they would be choosing for the year. We were told that hybrid class sizes would be smaller because many parents wanted the full-distance model. After we agreed to the schedules, the District told parents we would start in full-distance, and they did not have to decide yet. Since some parents knew they wanted full-distance classes for the year, classes for FDL were made, and then the rest of the classes were put together without thinking about how that would look when parents had to make a commitment in October. Now we are hearing that PAEA knew this would happen when we agreed to the hybrid schedules in the first place. This is false. In order to open for hybrid in-person instruction and to allow more families to choose distance learning at this juncture, almost all of the students will need to be reassigned to new teachers, and many



teachers will be displaced. The students will go from 5 days of synchronous instruction with a teacher and classmates they have known for 8 weeks, to a new class. If families now commit to distance learning, they will continue with 5 days a week of synchronous instruction, but most likely with another teacher and some, or all, different classmates. (This does not apply to the families that have already committed to full distance learning (FDL) and have been placed in dedicated FDL classes.) If families commit to coming back in hybrid mode now, they will have 2 days one week and 3 days the next of live instruction and 3 days/2 days of totally asynchronous instruction with no live support. Additionally, students will have fewer instructional minutes with their teachers in a hybrid classroom.

While we recognize the unique challenges that distance teaching and learning present, it is the best option that we have for delivering a high-quality uninterrupted education during this pandemic. Our teachers have worked tirelessly to transform their teaching practice into a distance approach, and it is working for the vast majority of our students. There is nothing that we would like more than for things to go back to "normal." Unfortunately, this cannot happen until we have this virus under control, and it no longer poses a substantial threat to the health and safety of our PAUSD community. We need to stay vigilant and not let our guard down a minute too soon.

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Unanswered Questions:

Teachers have asked many questions of their site administrators, HR, and District Directors. Answers include: "We are working on it," or "We will know soon." Teachers are starting Monday, September 28th, and they do not even know who their students are yet. They aren't necessarily the ones they have been working with online.

- Teachers have asked who the students' one-to-one attendants will be because they have heard many of them plan to go on medical leave or resign.
- What is the plan for students who run away since we cannot restrain them because of COVID?
- Without nurses nor health technicians at each site, who will tend to a student who has seizures while on campus? Someone is supposed to be holding their head, but if the student is not wearing a mask, that creates a greater risk of the transmission of the virus either to or from the student.
- What happens when a student has a behavioral incident? Teachers were told the Behavior team can only stand in the doorway; they cannot come in as they normally would.
- What will instruction look like? Some teachers were told it would look like "normal." Others have been told that every student will have a computer and the teacher will be in the front of the room with his/her computer delivering instruction. Students cannot use



paper and pencils to do work because the teacher cannot collect them. They have been told that they cannot have manipulatives or scissors to use because there are not enough for each student to have their own.

We have watched some of the Elementary Principals' recorded meetings with parents, and there were a lot of questions the principals could not answer, yet we are opening on Monday, September 28th to our special education students and two weeks later to TK - 1st grade. Here are some questions we heard parents ask:

- Why can't we know how many students have to choose distance learning and hybrid learning to keep the same teacher?
- Can we have the option to stay with the same teacher in whatever mode necessary?
- What happens when a class has to quarantine?
- We heard that it is possible that if the class is in quarantine, they would have 5 days a week of asynchronous learning until the quarantine is over. Is this true?
- What happens if our teacher gets ill?
- Are there enough substitutes, and are they trained to work in the current conditions?
- When will we know who our child's teacher will be?

We are not ready to open to in-person instruction until questions like these are addressed.

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Gaps in the Safety Plan:

The science to date shows that COVID-19 is spread through droplets and aerosols. After mask wearing and social distancing, proper ventilation/air filtration is the most important safety measure to stop the spread in an indoor setting with long exposure times. Teachers have asked to see the ventilation evaluation reports, so the PAEA President and Secondary Grievance Chair requested them. The answer they received on Friday, 9/26 was "check back at the end of next week." The end of next week is the end of the first week of school for our Moderate to Severe Special Education classes. Why don't we have the reports? Are they all done? We have been told in Board meetings they **were** done, and everything has been fixed. Teachers have asked what will be done if the ventilation system doesn't bring in the fresh air. Will they get air purifiers? PTAs have offered to purchase air purifiers, and then educators received letters from the district saying all devices purchased by the PTA will be "confiscated." Why? The district has not purchased any, and we start in-person on Monday, September 28th. Teachers are worried about the ventilation systems, so they started taking the grates off the vents in their classrooms. They were disgusted by how dirty they were. How can they be that dirty if they were all inspected, cleaned, and fixed? What will we do for those educators that have rooms and offices without windows? We were told the district is working on that, yet, in a safety meeting, Mike



Jacobs said there are no rooms without windows. That just is not true. There are both classrooms and specialized educators' offices without windows.

There was also no plan for smokey/unhealthy air days during which we need to close the windows and ventilation systems set to recirculate air. For COVID, you need to keep the windows open and have only fresh air brought into the rooms through ventilation systems. We have totally opposite mandates, and the resolution of the opposite guidance had not been addressed. The negotiations team asked, and the answer was that the ventilation systems were assessed and everything that needed to be fixed was done. But that didn't answer the question. So, we put it in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that it is being worked on. The district will only agree to cancel in-person classes when the air gets to the "red unhealthy" AQI 151-200. For the "orange unhealthy to sensitive groups," 101-150 in-person instruction will remain open.

Throughout negotiations, every time PAEA asked for safety measures in the MOU that were recommended in the guidance by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department (SCCPHD), the District would only commit to what is required, not what is recommended. The District has told the public that they are following the SCCPHD guidance. Does the District's "robust" safety plan acknowledge that the District is only committing to implementing the "required" guidance and not the "recommended" guidance? Does the community know the District will only commit to separating students' desks by 6 feet "when practicable"? The District will not agree to hire nurses or even health technicians for every site. The secretaries and clerks at the Elementary schools are expected to carry out many duties best handled by health techs or nurses.

PAEA fought hard to get face shields with cloth barriers for ALL educators. Those will not arrive until some time in October at the earliest, and we start on Monday, September 28th. Our special education teachers and Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs) were given one face shield clearly marked, "one-time use only." The district did not know until we brought it to your attention. Our Post-secondary staff received only one "one-time-only" face shield for 5 days. It is evident that more time is needed to ensure that all of the necessary PPE will arrive and be available for educators to use.

Given the still many unanswered questions, the clear majority sentiment of elementary staff to remain in distance mode until January, the lack of safety measures fully in place, and growing rather than decreasing confusion in the community, we, the undersigned, adamantly insist that the Palo Alto Unified School District is ill-prepared to open for in-person instruction. A rush to open at this time puts students, staff, and the community at large at risk of contracting a potentially deadly disease.

We don't want to be first; we want to be safe!



Sincerely,

The Palo Alto Educators Association Executive Board & Negotiations Team
and the following:

If you would like to sign our letter, please fill out the Google Form
at <https://tinyurl.com/PAEA-Open-Letter-Sept27>

There is a Special Board of Ed Meeting
Tuesday, September 29, at 5:30 PM

Please join the Zoom, raise your hand, and tell the Board that it
isn't safe enough to reopen in-person instruction yet. That they
are rushing to do so before positive cases are lower and before
they have plans and safeguards in place.

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WE WANT TO BE SAFE!

Via Video Conference/Internet: <https://pausd.zoom.us/j/96119564675>