



March 11, 2022

Dear Oakland Unified School District Board Members and Superintendent Johnson-Trammell,

We, the undersigned physicians and community leaders who work and live in Oakland, applaud the decision of OUSD to extend its policy requiring the wearing of masks by students and staff.

We understand that this decision may not be entirely popular, and that it diverges from decisions being made by other school boards in other jurisdictions. But, as a matter of health, safety, and equity, it is the right decision for Oakland in this moment. Your decision is principled and courageous. And your decision honors the following:

- Far too many of Oakland’s youth remain unvaccinated,
- All children under age 5 (many of whom have siblings enrolled in OUSD schools) cannot yet be vaccinated,
- For reasons not entirely yet understood, African American children are 2.5 times more likely to die from SARS-CoV-2 than their white counterparts,
- Latino children are 1.7 times more likely to die from SARS-CoV-2 than their white counterparts,
- 58% of children with post-COVID multisystem inflammatory syndrome condition (MIS-C) are of African American or Latino descent,
- Most MIS-C cases are occurring in school-age children 5 to 11 years old,
- Too little is known about the incidence and consequences (short- and long-term) of “long COVID” for children,
- Outpatient and other first line medications used to treat SARS-CoV-2 infection are not available to those under age 12.

Your decision is backed by data that makes clear that: **“universal masking policies [are] associated with markedly reduced secondary transmission compared with optional masking districts,”**¹ and that **“[m]asks remain an important part of a multicomponent approach to preventing COVID-19 in K-12 settings”**²

Your decision courageously embraces the goal of equity. By extending the mask mandate you have chosen to protect the wellbeing of at-risk individuals and families, particularly those living in Oakland's marginalized communities who are at greater risk for contracting COVID and more susceptible to severe COVID outcomes.

¹ Angelique Boutzoukas, M.D., et al., “School Masking Policies and Secondary SARS-CoV-2 Transmission, Pediatrics (2022) (DOI: 10.1542/peds.2022-056687) (finding that “among districts with universal masking policies, secondary transmission was reduced by 72% compared with districts having optional masking policies.”)

² Catherine Donovan, PhD, et al., “SARS-CoV-2 Incidence in K-12 School Districts with Mask-Required Versus Mask-Optional Policies – Arkansas, August-October 2021,” Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Vol. 71 No. 10 (March 11, 2022) (concluding that “school mask policies were associated with lower COVID-19 incidence in areas with moderate to substantial community transmission.”)

Take comfort in the fact that this policy aligns with personal practices and recommendations of the presidents of the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the heads of the nation's two leading medical professional organizations devoted to the health of our nation and our nation's youth, both of whom have vowed to continue to mask indoors to protect vulnerable populations.³ Take pride in the knowledge that OUSD's policy will prevent unnecessary suffering for Oakland families with school-age children.

We believe there are strong reasons for the Board to maintain its indoor masking protocols in place through the remainder of this school year, and then use the period of summer break to further vaccinate the unvaccinated, improve ventilation systems and indoor air quality monitoring in our public schools, and take stock of the burgeoning data regarding the pandemic's impacts on child and adolescent health. But for the moment, OUSD's continuation of its masking policy is the right decision.

OUSD's masking mandate responds to Oakland's realities and reflects the deeper values to which the City of Oakland aspires.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting the health of Oakland's youth.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Donna White Carey, MD, Executive Pastor, True Vine Ministries

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Pastor Michael McBride, Executive Director of Live Free

Donald Frazier, Executive Director, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency™

Aaron Ortiz, CEO, La Familia

Cc: Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, L. K. Monroe; County Administrator Susan Muranishi; Health Care Services Agency Director Colleen Chawla; Alameda County Public Health Officer, Nicholas Moss, MD; Alameda County Public Health Director Kimi Watkins-Tartt; Alameda County Board of Supervisors; Mayor Libby Schaff; Oakland City Council Members

³ See AMA Statement on CDC COVID-19 updates, <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-statement-cdc-covid-19-updates> and American Academy of Pediatrics Offers New Masking Recommendations for Families Following Updated CDC Guidance, <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2022/american-academy-of-pediatrics-offers-new-masking-recommendations-for-families-following-updated-cdc-guidance/>