



April 3, 2022

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

Over the past many months, we, the undersigned physicians and community leaders who work and live in Oakland, have offered our best advice to OUSD about how to keep students, staff and their families safe during this deadly and ongoing pandemic. We also have publicly applauded the evidence-based policies that OUSD has enacted consistent with these goals. To date, and to its credit, OUSD has stood by science and uplifted its commitment to equity – specifically the protection of some of Oakland’s most vulnerable communities – in the face of contrary public sentiment.

We now write to offer our considered views about the steps OUSD should adopt before the beginning of the Fall school semester. These recommendations are rooted in science, consider the history of SARS-CoV-2 including its variants, and take as their primary focus the health of those who frequent OUSD buildings, including those who live and work within the communities most impacted by this disease.

First and foremost, OUSD should *keep its current mandatory indoor masking policy in place*. Masking is highly effective, cost-effective, and in most cases the simplest way to prevent the spread of this (and other) viruses. As federal support ends for COVID testing, vaccination, and treatment for uninsured individuals, current disparities in infection, access to care, morbidity, and mortality, will only widen. Put simply, persons of African American and Latino/a/x descent will likely begin to suffer even more.

This foreseeable exacerbation of gaps in testing, treatment, and health outcomes between population groups underscores the need to maintain - not abandon - interventions that protect all individuals regardless of background or socioeconomic status. OUSD’s universal indoor masking policy provides universal protection for the OUSD community. We can say with strong confidence that, whatever the future trajectory of COVID-19, the most vulnerable OUSD members will remain uniquely vulnerable through the remainder of 2022. Therefore OUSD should maintain its mandatory indoor masking policy. OUSD should also make available to its community N95 masks including small KN95 masks for children.

It is also incumbent upon us to suggest additional, common-sense steps that OUSD should take to promote the health of its community. Specifically, we advise that OUSD:

- Ensure that *all* OUSD buildings have proper HVAC and filtration to ventilate and clean the air in classrooms, lunchrooms, and common areas.
- Modify the school calendar to increase the length of winter break - a time of year when infection rates historically surge - so that OUSD facilities do not become sites of transmission during anticipated surges.
- Cohort students, where possible, to reduce mixing and to facilitate outbreak investigation.
- Initiate wastewater sampling, especially at the highest risk school sites, to detect, track and respond to increases in SARS-CoV-2.

- Maintain and build upon remote learning options to accommodate students who require such options, and to support students requiring isolation.
- Offer onsite testing and vaccination to students and staff and their families, as OUSD facilities are often the most accessible and convenient places for the OUSD community to receive such services, and
- Assess performance of various school sites - within or outside the district, public and private - with respect to SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks and transmission, to determine best practices for adoption by OUSD.

These recommendations are considered, supportable and relatively modest. OUSD can achieve each of these recommendations with reasonable effort and without undue expense. Most importantly, these recommendations honor and advance the interests of equity. Equity is a value to which many have given lip service during the pandemic but which few have elevated to the fore. By adopting these policies, OUSD will rightfully stake a claim for health equity and stand up for those in the OUSD community who have been left back and left out through no fault of their own.

We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions you may have. We would be honored to collaborate with OUSD in whatever ways we can to protect the health of our children.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stacey Hunt, MD, President, Sinkler Miller Medical Association  
Michael Lenoir, MD, African American Wellness Project  
Donna White Carey, MD, Executive Pastor, True Vine Ministries  
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Damon Francis, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Health Leads  
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Donald Frazier, Executive Director, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency™  
Pastor Michael McBride, Executive Director, Live Free  
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