



August 18, 2021

Dear Dr. Aboelata and Oakland Leaders:

Thank you for taking the time to send your thoughts and concerns.

We understand that these unprecedented times are difficult and stressful for everyone in our school communities. We want to assure you that the safety of all, but most especially our students, is of the utmost importance. The following are our responses to your questions. We have done our best to respond to each one but please let us know if we have missed something.

Your question: Given a lack of required or routine testing, what assurances do parents have that positive cases among teachers, staff, or students, will be identified and responded to in a timely fashion?

Our response: OUSD worked with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to design the OUSD Testing Program. It has been designed to be robust, nimble, and accessible with equity at the forefront -- available for free to all staff, students, and OUSD family members. To be clear, the COVID Testing Program offers the following:

- 10 regional testing locations, strategically placed in the most vulnerable zip codes with the highest case rates and lowest vaccination rates.
- At-home rapid testing kits available for pick-up at EVERY school site, provided by CDPH.
- Rapid Response teams with the flexibility to be deployed to school sites who need the most timely support, such as after a positive case or to support modified quarantine for students.

OUSD is strongly encouraging regular testing once or twice a week for anyone who is unvaccinated (among others) and has made testing available to every staff member, student, and family who needs it. Additionally, the District is following CDPH guidance and requiring testing in most circumstances where there are symptoms or exposures. Anybody who develops symptoms while at school will be immediately isolated, asked to be tested if there is on-site testing or sent home with an at-home testing kit. Per County guidance, symptomatic students and staff are required to have a negative PCR or quarantine for 10 days in order to return to school.

As we announced last week, starting on September 7, 2021, all District staff will be required to be vaccinated against COVID, or submit to weekly testing, which will help ensure that our staff remains safe and healthy and provide a protective line of defense around our students.

The COVID response team gets automated notifications for any positive test notification that is submitted. From there, the contact tracing team conducts a contact tracing interview and the COVID response team may conduct a meeting with the principal, if needed, and to determine whether a modified quarantine (with twice-weekly testing from the Rapid Response team) is appropriate. A meeting is usually held the same day (or the next morning depending on when the notification is submitted) as when the positive notification is submitted. There are also default plans for when OUSD staff is not able to get in touch with the student's family in a timely manner. Also, please note that the majority of positive cases that have been submitted are from tests performed outside of OUSD's testing program.

Your question: What assurances can OUSD provide that outbreak investigation and contact tracing programs can meet demand, and that persons are being told timely that they have been in close proximity to infected individuals and properly instructed on steps they must take to protect themselves and others?

Our response: We have a student contact tracing team, a staff contact tracing team, and a multi-departmental COVID Response team who manage the contact tracing process, continuously update District protocols to match the state and county guidelines, collaborate with state and local public health departments, provide training to staff, deploy rapid response testing teams, and ensure that OUSD protocols and systems are being used appropriately.

The aim is to respond to all cases within 24 hours, usually much sooner than that. A response to a positive case includes the following (consistent with state and county guidance): an interview with the positive individual and the site principal/supervisor; principal guidance regarding communication that needs to go to the community; and automatic notifications of close contacts, custodial, transportation services, labor partners, and the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD). The letter to positive individuals advises them about their quarantine period and, if it is an employee, information about their leave. Close contact notifications follow the guidance from CDPH for unvaccinated as opposed to vaccinated individuals and for masked as opposed to unmasked students. Rapid response teams are usually scheduled within 24 hours to begin two times per week testing during the modified quarantine.

The contact tracing teams meet twice daily to review all positive notifications from on-site testing locations, OUSD-allocated rapid at-home test kits, and self-reported through ParentSquare health screener or via principals.

There are regular checks to verify that the contact tracing teams can meet demand or that they need additional support. OUSD always tries to partner closely with the county in situations where there are potential outbreaks so that the county outbreaks team can provide additional guidance as needed.

In addition, a number of automated systems have been created to support contact tracing teams' efforts to keep track of positive cases, exposures, and symptoms. Checks and balances have been created in order to help track and address in a timely manner the numerous kinds of notifications received. The most important thing that the community can do to support this process is to get in the habit of reporting positive cases, prolonged close contact exposures, and symptoms as quickly as possible, either through their school site leaders and/or via ParentSquare's health screener.

Your question: What is the isolation and quarantine policy for symptomatic students, staff and teachers? What is the testing and isolation plan for students who become symptomatic at school?

Our response: The complete protocol is [here](#), which includes steps to take when a student is symptomatic at home. Symptomatic individuals should take rapid at-home test kits home with them. Each kit has 2 tests, allowing the individual to test themselves a few days apart, while they are in quarantine for their symptoms. A positive rapid test can help get people who have COVID-19 into isolation quickly; however, symptomatic staff and students who are unsure if they have COVID-19 must have a negative PCR or quarantine for 10 days in order to return to school.

When students develop symptoms at school, they will be isolated in their school's pre-identified Wellness Space while waiting for a caregiver to pick them up. If there is on-site testing at that location, they will be highly encouraged to get tested on the spot; otherwise, they will be sent home with an at-home testing kit and encouraged to self-test and upload results ASAP or they'll be referred to one of OUSD's regional testing sites.

For those who do not wish to undergo COVID testing, symptomatic individuals also have the option to isolate for the full 10 days without testing. Symptomatic students must be cleared for return under the guidance of the COVID team, but generally speaking, symptomatic students may return to school sooner than 10 days if they meet the following conditions: a) negative PCR test (at-home testing kit will not suffice); b) 24-hours fever free; and c) improving symptoms.

Your Question: And what is the learning plan for children who need to isolate at home?

Our Response: If fewer than 3 students in a class must isolate at home, then the students will participate in independent study as offered by their teacher for 10 days. Teachers will utilize a learning management system (Google Classroom or Seesaw) to assign and collect student work during this period. Students will access instructional technology applications through Clever as they would at school. If more than 3 students must isolate, then the entire class will shift to school-based independent study for the isolation period. Teacher Central houses instructional materials (slides decks, curricular guidance and instructional technology applications) that teachers can use for in person or distance learning. Families may also choose full time independent study and transfer to Sojourner Truth Academy.

Your Question: What indicators did OUSD assess to arrive at the conclusion that we are ready for such reopening?

Our Response: The State made clear in June 2021 that all districts should prepare for a full-time, in-person return to school for the 21-22 school year. Preparation had already been underway during the 20-21 school year to purchase PPE, upgrade ventilation, build up our contact tracing capacity, and expand our testing and vaccination partnerships with the state and the county. OUSD met all the safety requirements in the spring for our phased reopening process, and OUSD currently meets or exceeds all the CDPH guidelines for in-person instruction. To our knowledge, all school districts in California are opening to full-time, in-person instruction this fall.

Your Question: What peer-reviewed data suggests that distancing is not needed in a school setting, particularly in light of the Delta strain?

Our Response: When it comes to specific areas of public health guidance, such as physical distancing in a school setting, we defer to public health experts at ACPHD and CDPH. In releasing their guidelines for school reopening, CDPH made it clear that physical distancing was not required for the 21-22 school year, based on their review of the research done during the 20-21 school year.

Your Question: How will distancing, testing and masking guidelines be reviewed and updated?

Our Response: The COVID Response team meets almost daily to review the latest guidelines, and weekly with the state and with the county. When state or county guidance is updated, the District's protocols are generally updated within the week. OUSD regularly advocates for revisions and clarifications to county/state guidance based on the feedback we hear from our community and our own opinions. We feel that a strong collaboration between OUSD and public health professionals is the best way to guide decision-making for our schools. OUSD also consults regularly with the UCSF Pediatric Taskforce for clinical guidance when needed.

Your Question: How many epidemiologists are now working to analyze COVID-19 data for the district and what information does OUSD prioritize for collecting and reporting?

Our Response: OUSD's COVID Response Team is in regular communication with CDPH, ACOE, ACPHD, the UCSF Pediatric Task Force, and the Outbreak team at ACPHD to review our plans and ask questions about the guidance. The District maintains a [public case dashboard here](#), to be fully transparent with the community.

Your Question: What has the District found to date with respect to the rate of spread of the virus and the areas and populations most affected by the virus?

Our Response: Overall case rates are tracked through the ACPHD website. By focusing on the zip codes where COVID rates are the highest, we are able to prioritize where to establish standing regional testing hubs, which are accessible to staff, students, and family members, and also where to work with individual schools to host vaccine pop-up events for staff, students, and family members.

Your Question: What were the results of outbreaks in the 2020-21 school year, how were they identified, and what was the response?

Our Response: Outbreaks were identified as 3+ cases in a 2-week period at one site that are epidemiologically linked, as determined by the Alameda County Public Health Department Outbreak team. Any time the threshold of 3+ cases in a 2-week period was reached, District staff consulted with the Outbreak team, who conducted their own contact tracing, on top of the OUSD contact tracing interviews, to determine if the cases were epidemiologically linked. In two cases at the end of May 2021, it was determined that there were two outbreaks related to youth sports, which was consistent with what the ACPHD Outbreak team was seeing across Alameda County as high-contact sports had just resumed recently at that point. Following the first case notification, all close contacts, which in these cases were the entire sports teams, as well as any opposing teams they may have played during the infectious period of the index case person, would have been advised to quarantine and not participate in school, sports, or any other in-person activities.

Your Question: What is the plan for indoor classroom set up and mitigation strategies to decrease the risk of transmission?

Our Response: All classrooms have been outfitted with 2 HEPA air purifiers, on top of existing HVAC systems having upgraded MERV 16 filters installed, as well as existing operable doors and windows that let in outside air. Beyond ventilation, every classroom has access to PPE that includes adult and child masks and hand sanitizer.

Your Question: Which OUSD classrooms have HVAC systems, and which will rely upon opening classroom windows and doors and/or portable filtration units?

Our Response: All classrooms are being provided with portable filtration units, which are HEPA-grade air purifiers. Upgraded filters were installed in all existing HVAC systems.

Your Question: What is the plan for lunch periods - will lunches be held indoors or outdoors and will they be staggered?

Our Response: Lunches are generally being held both indoors and outdoors, and are staggered at almost every school, to ensure there is a greater ability to space students out inside the cafeteria. At the secondary level, we have worked hard to get students 12-18 years old access to vaccination which greatly reduces a student's risk. Additionally, schools have large drum fans that dramatically increase the ventilation in cafeterias. Schools are also advised to use as much outdoor space as possible for eating breakfast and lunch, and to minimize the amount of time indoors in the cafeteria to 15 minutes or less where possible.

Your Question: What will be done differently on days of poor air quality or inclement weather?

Our Response: The District's investment in HVAC filtration and air purifiers in the classrooms and shared spaces was intended to make the physical environment safer for students in the COVID era, but the ventilation also makes it possible for students to be inside and breathing filtered air when we have poor air quality. Air Quality is a critical health equity consideration for us as a district and we have been installing permanent IQ air purification systems in many of our classrooms particularly in East and West Oakland.

The following are specific demands in your letter and we respond to each one in turn:

- **symptomatic students, staff and teachers isolate and test negative before presenting to any school site**

Our Response: Symptomatic individuals have two options to return to our school sites: 1) isolate for 10 days without needing to test; or 2) provide a negative PCR test (or doctor's note) AND have improving symptoms, AND be fever-free for 24 hours. Given that not everybody wishes to get tested, it is most equitable and inclusive to continue offering these two options, which are also in accordance with public health guidance.

- **every school site have supplies and staff for onsite COVID-19 testing**

Our Response: Every school site was provided with rapid at-home test kits. OUSD is actively advocating with CDPH to get more at-home testing kits. As the first major urban district to reopen, it is important to demonstrate that our community will be using the rapid at-home test kits, and are uploading results, before they permit us to have more. At this point, we have 10% of California's supply of at-home testing kits. Our usage rate in the first week will give CDPH rationale of whether to order more for the state and thus distribute more to OUSD. We continue to explore other models for site-based testing that also enable us to mobilize for rapid response in order to prevent outbreaks.

- **all unvaccinated teachers and staff undergo at least weekly mandatory testing**

Our Response: Effective Tuesday, September 7, 2021, all OUSD staff, contractors, and volunteers (including remote workers) will be required to be fully vaccinated, or alternatively, get a COVID test at least once a week. As of August 10, 2021, 92% of 3,700+ staff members have reported that they are already fully vaccinated.

- **all unvaccinated teachers and staff wear N95 masks at all times**

Our Response: The CDC does not currently recommend N95 masks for use in the school setting. We have purchased over 15k N95 masks to have on hand for those staff who need them for administering medical procedures on our campuses, who are unvaccinated, who may have underlying conditions, or who have other needs that would necessitate a medical-grade mask. As of August 10, 2021, 92% of 3,700+ staff members have reported that they are already fully vaccinated.

- **the following data points be included on the OUSD Dashboard:**
 - **ventilation strategy being utilized at each school site**

Our Response: Every site in the district is provided 2 HEPA air purifiers in each classroom, to ensure there is a solid foundation for improved air filtration in our schools. As all of our school buildings were designed, built, and upgraded at different points in the last 100 years, we know that the types of HVAC systems we have vary greatly depending on when they were last installed. To that end, our ventilation strategy was to ensure that we had clean air in EVERY classroom, by ensuring that we had air purifiers available for ALL of our schools, regardless of the type of HVAC system or number of operable windows that we would have available at any given site.

- **distancing guideline(s) being observed at each school site for each common area (classrooms, hallways, multi-use rooms)**

Our Response: We are following [California Department of Public Health \(CDPH\) guidelines](#). Per CDPH Physical distancing: Recent evidence indicates that in-person instruction can occur safely without minimum physical distancing requirements when other mitigation strategies (e.g., masking) are implemented. This is consistent with CDC K-12 School Guidance. CDPH is no longer recommending physical distancing and has instead required indoor masking for California schools, regardless of vaccination status. In addition, OUSD is now requiring outdoor masking.

- **percentage of vaccinated teachers and staff at each school site**

Our Response: As of August 10, 2021, 92% of 3,700+ staff members have reported that they are already fully vaccinated.

- **notification of each COVID-19 outbreak with number of student and teacher/staff cases**

Our Response: The District's [COVID case dashboard can be found here](#). In the interest of privacy, the District must report combined staff and student cases at the school level but can provide the staff vs. student breakdown in the aggregate at the district level.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns with us and we appreciate your offer to also support and partner on behalf of our students, their families and communities. We welcome the opportunity to talk further about how we can work together to continue to promote vaccinations for all eligible Oakland residents 12 years and older, share critical information about public health guidance, support safety protocols and create a culture of care and support among our school communities.

We appreciate all that each of you do for our community.

Respectfully,



Shanthi Gonzales
President, OUSD School Board



Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell
Superintendent, OUSD