

December 29, 2022

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

We, the undersigned physicians and community leaders who work and live in Oakland, encourage the district to implement COVID mitigation and other measures to ensure student safety in advance of their return from winter break.

Given the health concerns of COVID, RSV and influenza, among others, it is as critical now as ever before that you reinstate your policy mandating masks indoors by students and staff.

As locations where there is significant mixing, schools drive transmission in the community. A recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* demonstrated that among school districts in the greater Boston area, lifting mask requirements was associated with an additional 44.9 COVID-19 cases per 1000 students and staff in the weeks after the masking policy was rescinded.<sup>1</sup> And a recent preprint of a study conducted in France determined that individuals between the ages of 10-19 were the highest drivers of community transmission, followed by those below nine years old.<sup>2</sup> Reinstating masking requirements upon return from the winter break will protect not only students and staff, but the broader community during a period of high transmission and following increased travel and exposure over the holidays.

Ideally, the district should consider extending the winter break to allow for a level of isolation of students who have been mixing, gathering, and possibly traveling during the holiday. While this may be a longer-term option, there is no reason to delay measures such as mask wearing.

We ask that the board emulate the actions by the city of Oakland which reinstated mask requirements for everyone 6 years and older in all its facilities, including libraries, senior centers, senior adult care facilities, recreation centers and civic center buildings.

In addition, we encourage the district to recommit to the goal of equity. Reinstating mask requirements recognizes that Oakland's marginalized communities are at greater risk for contracting COVID and more susceptible to severe COVID outcomes than their more privileged counterparts. This action would protect the wellbeing of at-risk individuals and families, helping to redress the plight of those left back and left out through no fault of their own.

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<sup>1</sup> Cowger, T., Murray, E. Clarke, J, *Lifting Universal Masking in Schools — Covid-19 Incidence among Students and Staff*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, November 24, 2022, [nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2211029](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2211029), Last accessed: December 27, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Goldstein, E., *On the role of different age groups in propagating Omicron epidemics in France*, Preprint, MedRxiv December 23, 2022, [doi.org/10.1101/2022.12.22.22283867](https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.12.22.22283867) Last accessed: December 27, 2022

OUSD should encourage and normalize mask use by providing KN95, KF94 and/or N95 masks as a modest step to reduce spread, limit the surge, and spare vulnerable people from the wide-ranging impacts of COVID.

The current surge and levels of transmission present an opportunity for the board to look at broad common-sense steps that we have presented before to protect the health of the community:

- Ensure that OUSD buildings have proper HVAC and air 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 facilitate outbreak investigation
- Initiate wastewater sampling to detect, track and publicly report the prevalence of the virus on OUSD campuses,
- Maintain and amplify remote learning options to accommodate students who require such options, and to support students on isolation, and
- Offer onsite testing and vaccination to students and staff and their families, as OUSD facilities are often the most accessible and convenient places for them to receive such services.

We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions you may have. As always, we would be honored to collaborate with OUSD to protect the health of our children and community.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

**Michael Lenoir, MD**, Pediatrician, African American Wellness Project

**Aisha Mays, MD**, Director of Adolescent and School-Based Services, Roots Community Health Center

**Noha Aboelata, MD**, CEO, Roots Community Health Center

**Kim F. Rhoads, MD, MS, MPH**, Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Founding Director, Umoja Health

**Andreas Mitchell, MD**, Primary Care Physician, Roots Community Health Center

**Rev. Dr. Jacqueline A. Thompson, Senior Pastor**, Allen Temple Baptist Church

**Chris Iglesias, CEO**, Unity Council

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

**Abner J Boles, III Ph.D., Chair**, Leadership Council, Brotherhood of Elders Network

**Pastor Michael McBride, Executive Director** of Live Free

**Aaron Ortiz, CEO**, La Familia

**Carolyn Johnson, CEO**, Black Cultural Zone Community Development Corporation

**Tanya Dennis, Oakland Frontline Healers**

**Resilient Fruitvale Collaborative**