

# San Diego school districts move to resume in-person classes

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The San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), the second largest district in California, announced on Tuesday it was targeting April 5 as the deadline to begin reopening campuses after almost a year of online learning due to the coronavirus pandemic.

San Diego Unified school board member Richard Barrera told the media that teachers were scheduled to return to buildings the week of April 5, with all K-12 students returning the following week on April 12, provided that the county has returned to the “red tier” established by state health codes and vaccines are made “available” to all staff.

San Diego County will begin making COVID-19 vaccines available to everyone starting March 1. This follows Governor Gavin Newsom’s announcement last week that the state will reserve 10 percent of vaccines for school staff, educators and child care workers. Statewide, an estimated 75,000 first doses of the vaccine will be given every week to teachers.

The news was greeted with enthusiasm by the political and media establishment, who want a return to on-site learning to better facilitate reopening the economy and compel parents with children to go back to work.

Much has been made about the vaccine distribution, but SDUSD is not actually requiring all staff to get vaccinated, merely to have vaccines “available.” This loophole would allow schools to reopen without having everyone inoculated against the virus.

The announcement comes on the heels of new scientific research which has revealed that the California variant of the disease has acquired new and dangerous mutations. This underscores the absolute necessity of closing schools and all non-essential businesses until it is safe to reopen.

“The [California] findings warrant taking a much

closer look at this variant. ... They underscore the importance of pulling out all the stops in terms of both exposure reduction and increased vaccine distribution and access,” one infectious disease expert told the *Los Angeles Times*.

The trade unions, led by the San Diego Education Association (SDEA), have been instrumental in preparing the groundwork for a return to schools, despite the overwhelming scientific evidence that this will lead to a resurgence of COVID cases in the community and throughout the region.

In a statement, Kisha Borden, president of the SDEA, said, “We are hopeful that a combination of vaccination for school employees, on-site mitigation (such as ventilation, testing, social distancing and masks), and community case rates that allow San Diego County to return to the red tier for the first time since the fall will allow us to offer in-person opportunities to all students by April 12 while still allowing online opportunities for students whose families do not feel comfortable returning in person.”

San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria cynically tried to pose as the friend of working families by saying, “This news provides some relief to parents who have had to juggle multiple roles during the pandemic.”

Much of the media coverage has focused heavily on parents who want a return to in-person learning for the sake of the emotional and psychological well-being of their children. These groups, like “Reopen California,” have only attracted relatively small crowds of mostly well-off, right-wing parents.

The overwhelming sentiment among teachers and families is to delay on-site learning until the virus has subsided. These views, which go against the corporate drive to pump profits out of parents with children, have been essentially blacked out of the media coverage or

presented at most as a problem to be overcome.

The district and the unions have sought to downplay these concerns by announcing that the schools will reopen in phases, using hybrid models which feature on-site and online learning, and limiting the number of school days in the week. Families are also being asked to share their preference for on-site or online learning via a survey to be released this month.

The unions have agreed at every critical juncture to the timetables established by the school district who contemptuously announce their decisions at the end of long board meetings through vague-sounding emails. The unions' role is to play for time while the school administrators and their corporate sponsors are able to formulate a reopening plan which addresses none of the concerns that parents and educators have been expressing.

On Monday, the SDUSD expanded its in-person instruction to "learning and classroom labs," which will allow for up to 22,000 students on campuses. Since November, the district has been offering "scheduled learning appointments" to Special Education and PreK-5 students. Currently over 4,000 students and 3,500 staff are engaged in in-person instruction.

Elsewhere in the city, the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD), the second largest district in San Diego, reached a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sweetwater Education Association (SEA) union to reopen two weeks after average case rates in the area reach the "red tier."

Under the agreement, hybrid instruction will be offered to 10 percent of the student population on campuses. In-person teaching will be provided on a voluntary basis. These volunteer teachers will maintain their caseloads and teach online, as well as teach hybrid in-person classes. Teachers and students could be back on campuses as early as April 5.

Many parents and educators have already expressed their opposition to the reopening via social media. One person complained that they were tired of being informed by their TV news station instead of directly by the school district. Another person questioned what would even be the purpose of reopening buildings for only a few weeks of instruction.

Special education teachers also voiced their concerns that their students, who require more up close and personal assistance and are more susceptible to the

virus, were being ignored by administrators.

Another parent told local media, "There are no vaccines for kids yet. ... I don't think they will keep their social distance, especially my little one. I don't think he will keep his mask on."

Throughout the pandemic, the unions have collaborated all over the country to force teachers back to work despite the dangers. Teachers and families have been left in the dark as to upcoming details and news regarding reopenings and safety precautions.

San Diego teachers and parents must oppose the premature reopening of schools until it is absolutely safe to return. Their friends are not to be found in the trade unions or the Democratic Party, who do the bidding of corporate America. They must build rank-and-file committees democratically controlled by themselves and not tied to the bourgeois parties and trade unions.

This must be fought for not only in San Diego and throughout California, but throughout the world in a conscious struggle against capitalism. The solution to the ongoing crisis must be based on reason and science, and this can only be achieved under socialism.



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