

As Delta variant spreads, Southern California schools plan full reopening of schools this fall

Melody Isley
29 June 2021

As California ended most of its COVID-19 restrictions this month, major school districts in the southern part of the state have loosened restrictions for summer school and are preparing for a full reopening this fall. June 15 marked the end of California's tiered reopening system and most of the state's COVID-19 restrictions, including mask mandates for vaccinated people, and social distancing and capacity requirements at shops, restaurants, gyms, stadiums and other workplaces.

Under conditions in which millions of people remain unvaccinated, including all children under 12 years old, and the more transmissible and lethal Delta variant is spreading throughout the state, these moves are criminal and will lead to an unknown number of infections and deaths throughout the region.

Schools will still require masks indoors for students and staff, but the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recently noted that "this may change pending updates for K-12 operational guidance from the CDC" for fall school reopenings. In Southern California, schools will be reopening with some restrictions, though most will not be enforced.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the largest district in California and second largest in the country with a student population of over 600,000, recently announced its plans for a full reopening this fall, with the semester starting on August 16. Classes will be in session five days a week for all grade levels.

Reopening guidelines follow CDPH and Los Angeles Department of Public Health (LADPH) protocols, which have loosened already inadequate safety measures in schools. Three-foot social distancing will now be allowed indoors between students, and required COVID-19 testing of students will be subject to change for the fall "based on evolving pandemic conditions." Funding for distance learning from the state ends on June 30, so the option for distance learning for families will be offered through outsourced online curriculum companies, including Apex Learning and Edgenuity.

LAUSD reached a tentative agreement with the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) on June 17 for the full reopening of campuses during the 2021-22 school year. The UTLA and the mainstream media have touted that 94 percent of the teachers, counselors, librarians, school nurses and other certificated employees voted to support the deal. However, close to 18,000 of its more than 30,000 members, or 60 percent, abstained from the vote, which the union held after the school year had ended and teachers and staff had begun their summer break.

After forcing through the reopening of schools in April, the UTLA has committed yet another betrayal against teachers, students and their families, by pushing to fully reopen schools this fall. In a recent statement, UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz said: "With the approval of this agreement, schools across Los Angeles will have critical COVID safety protocols in place when we welcome students back to the joys of full-time in-person learning."

Opposition among LAUSD parents has been expressed through multiple Facebook groups, including "Our Voice." Virginia, an LAUSD parent and member of the group, said, "From the start of the pandemic, I was worried about how my family was going to get through. We have three young kids, and we felt a lot of pressure with school and work. Before the pandemic, my employer gave me three days of work, and my husband worked five days of the week. When the pandemic hit, we both lost our jobs. Our family wasn't able to pay the rent for three months. It was hard for us. Some of our neighbors to this day have not been able to pay any of their rent."

"Recently, in our Facebook group I was informed that LAUSD is planning on opening the schools five days a week this fall. The district wants things to look normal, but I don't think the moment is here yet to ask to normalize everything. The COVID virus continues to spread every day."

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), like many districts in California, will be using their upcoming summer school program, which began Monday, to test loosened mitigation measures in classrooms and on school campuses. The district will also be offering fully in-person classes for all grades in the fall and will offer an online option for families similar to the privatized option provided by LAUSD.

In a recent statement, LBUSD Superintendent Jill Baker noted: "We believe that in-person instruction and the opportunity to provide wrap-around services to families can be best accomplished with students in our schools. It is for this reason that we will be pushing to have all students return to in-person instruction for full-day, full-program experiences."

LBUSD will also follow CDPH and local public health protocols for reopening. Whatever testing procedures and options existed for the spring reopening will not be present this fall, despite young people being unable to receive the vaccine. The lack of vaccines for children under 12 years old has been a major source of opposition to reopening among parents on social media. Like all

other districts throughout the state, LBUSD will not require vaccination of students or staff as a prerequisite to return to schools.

San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), the second largest district in California after LAUSD with a student population of over 120,000, also has plans to reopen in full this fall semester, which begins August 30. SDUSD resumed in-person learning in April, held graduation ceremonies at the San Diego Petco Park baseball stadium in June, and began its summer programs last week. Regarding the safety of staff and students, the district does not require the vaccination of students or their teachers and will also follow state and local public health department protocols for reopening in the fall.

The district points to its partnership with UC San Diego's COVID-19 asymptomatic testing program for students and teachers as a major safety feature. However, testing is not mandatory and has particularly troubling low turnout for the populations of these schools. According to the UCSD testing website for SDUSD, on average only a handful of students at each school site are getting tested on a weekly basis. The present low rate of student testing, coupled with inadequate contact tracing procedures, gives a highly inaccurate measure of COVID-19 cases in schools.

Speaking with the *World Socialist Web Site* on the district's testing program since schools reopened in April, one SDUSD parent said: "Last month I asked the school nurse how many other students on campus are getting tested regularly. My son was one of four other students at his school getting tested. When I asked why that might be, the nurse told me that the testing is really there to reassure parents."

Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD), the second largest district in San Diego County which serves a student population of nearly 40,000 students, operates on a year-round schedule and has reopened for summer school with loosened restrictions. On July 26, SUHSD will be the first district in San Diego to resume its regular school year, fully reopened.

In order to double the number of students in classrooms from 12 to 24 students, SUHSD summer schools have loosened restrictions to include three-foot social distancing among students. Like most districts in San Diego, Sweetwater schools will fully resume in-person learning this fall, with no capacity limits or physical distancing and with no improvements to ventilation systems or other safety conditions.

Even in its initial safety plans, the 2020-21 school year reopening guidelines for Sweetwater primarily referred to hand washing, masking, temperature checks, and general cleaning procedures as prevention against COVID-19. The district was criticized by its teachers for improper ventilation, especially as cases were spiking, and it became common knowledge that the coronavirus is airborne and most easily transmitted in indoor environments such as classrooms.

Under these conditions, it was up to educators and parents themselves to expose the practical reality of these unsafe and unscientific measures like ionizers in classrooms. The San Diego Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is still calling for proper ventilation and safety.

Despite the patently unsafe conditions in schools, Democratic Party politicians, local district officials, the unions and the media have all proclaimed that schools are entirely safe to reopen. In the United Kingdom, schools have been reopened for months with lifted restrictions, resulting in a dramatic increase in cases among children, now five times greater than older individuals. Fueling this increase in the UK and elsewhere is the more contagious Delta variant, now responsible for 99 percent of new cases in the UK.

The American ruling class is well aware of the dangers in reopening but continues to prioritize profits above workers' and students' lives and safety. Los Angeles Public Health Director Barbara Farrer reported this week that LA has seen growing cases of the Delta variant, warning: "It is the most infectious variant that has been identified to date here in California, and that means that for those people who are unvaccinated it is going to pose a big risk because it spreads so easily." The variant poses a huge threat to schools especially, as these are the places with the largest population of unvaccinated people—children.

The removal of even the barest restrictions that were in California follows the official policy of both big business parties: the normalization of mass death and disease for the sake of profits. The primary objective has been, and continues to be, forcing the working class to resume full, unrestricted and unprotected productivity, even as COVID-19 remains a threat to their lives and their families.

Parents, teachers and students in California and internationally must continue to fight for their health and safety. Despite reporting on average 1,500 new cases each day and more than 100 deaths each week, the state of California has declared the pandemic to be over. Parents and teachers must demand adequate safety measures in their classrooms and adequate resources be given for proper online education. We urge all educators, parents and students seeking to fight for lives over profits to sign up today to join and build a rank-and-file committee in your workplace, in unity with similar committees across the US and internationally.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact