



John Bohannon, Superintendent
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6-10-2021

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Governor Newsom,

The Durham Unified School Board of Trustees writes this letter to encourage you to empower rural counties and small school districts (Durham Unified is under 1,000 total students) to be granted flexibility with the current mask mandates at school. We have been in school part time in person since October, 2020 and full time in person since March 1, and have not seen any significant increase in contagion rates. All of our teachers/staff who wanted the vaccine have received it and it is readily available to all community members for which the vaccines are approved under emergency authorization use.

The state of California currently labels the Butte County Risk Level at Moderate (Orange). As of June 8, there have been a total of 12,118 cases in Butte County, of a large number have come from our neighboring low-risk college-aged students (nearly 3,000) and only 8.9% have come from school age children. Only 152 (about 2.5% of the total population) confirmed positive cases of that total number has come from people living in the community of Durham since the beginning of the pandemic. The attached Durham Unified School District community dashboard displays the small number of confirmed positive COVID-19 cases among our students and staff (available at durhamunified.org/dusd-covid-19-community-dashboard). Therefore, our town statistics do not warrant a State of Emergency anymore and do not justify the extreme measures that are still in place at our schools; social distancing, reduced student capacity in common areas, multiple academic/extracurricular events canceled, and full-time masking.



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We believe that your administration's approach to California's pandemic response has not taken into account that our state is not a one-size-fits-all. Small rural communities should not have to follow the same strict measures of densely populated cities. We are naturally distanced because of our small class sizes and small school enrollment. We also have followed the required distancing measures recommended by the CDC including maintaining social distancing and installing plexiglass shields on desks and tables to separate students in classrooms. We have been in some form of in person instruction for 8 months now and have no verifiable student-to-student reported COVID-19 cases at school. It is time to stop requiring all of the measures when we know students have shown they are not high spreaders of the virus. Parents are reporting the virus response and strict measures to be causing more harm than good to the neurological, psychological, and physical health of our youth.

Our ultimate goal as a district is to provide optimal learning for our students and that includes being able to support physical, social, academic and emotional development. The 6-hour daily wearing of masks is taking a toll on many of our students. Here is a list of a few of the side effects parents have reported to the DUSD Board of Trustees of prolonged mask-wearing that they have witnessed in our students and/or verified by multiple peer-reviewed mask studies:

- Headaches
- withdrawn behaviors
- Shortness of breath/hyperventilation
- Chest pain
- Chronic stress
- Immunosuppression
- Hypoxia
- Insomnia/fatigue
- Depression/anxiety
- compromised cognitive performance



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If we are truly concerned about our children's health and well-being, we will start looking at the whole picture of neurological, psychological, and physical health, not just the ever-changing targets of virus avoidance. It is time to give some local control back to counties and districts to make decisions that are best for their population. We are asking you to allow mask wearing to be a recommendation, not a requirement in our school district. Let parents and students decide what is the best decision for their overall health and allow our school district to remove the make mask wearing requirement and replace it with a recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Durham Unified Board of Trustees: Matthew Thorpe, Jennie DuBose, Lance Smith, David Loudermilk

Ed McLaughlin, Board President

cc: Senator Jim Nielsen, Assemblyman James Gallagher, Congressman Doug LaMalfa, Butte County Board of Supervisors, Butte County Health Department

