



August 9, 2021

Interim Superintendent Megan K. Reilly
Office of the Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 South Beaudry Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Superintendent Reilly:

On behalf of Reclaim Our Schools Los Angeles, we write to express our concerns about the health and safety protocols related to the upcoming 2021-2022 school year, the online alternative to in-person schooling, and the District's communication of these matters with parents and the school community. As you know, the anchor organizations of Reclaim Our Schools include Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), LA Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), Students Deserve, and UTLA. We represent grassroots parents, students, educators and community members who are committed to protecting and transforming our public schools for every child in LAUSD.

We appreciate the District's efforts in preparing for the physical reopening of our schools in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic as well as adopting some of the most protective health and safety protocols in the country. However, as we approach the next academic year, we are concerned that an ever-growing part of our school community is being ignored. As you know, the dramatic rise in cases of Delta variant infections remind us that we are not out of the woods yet, especially when Black and Brown communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID and such a large number of our students remain unvaccinated. In Los Angeles, while vaccination rates are higher than the national average, children under the age of 12 remain ineligible for the vaccine's protection and a vaccine for them is not expected until mid-winter. Despite the District's outreach efforts, parents, students and educators are concerned about the health and safety of a physical return to schools. We are also increasingly frustrated by the District's inconsistent and hypocritical messages, as its own representatives - including those dedicated to COVID response - are permitted to work remotely indefinitely, while at the same time encouraging families to send their children back to school.

We write this letter out of widespread community concern to urge the District to honor its commitments to full transparency and communication, continued strict measures for health and safety, and a high-quality online distance learning alternative.

Transparency & Communication

We do not feel that the District has set clear protocols and options that have been transparently communicated to parents regarding the upcoming school year. On June 22, 2021, the District adopted a resolution affirming Los Angeles Unified's commitment to protect the health and safety of students, staff and families when schools reopen for the 2021-22 school year. It provides that *"...the District shall ensure that all parents, families, and students have access to timely and accurate information concerning the physical reopening of our campuses and that school site administrators will be responsible for effectively and accurately communicating relevant reopening policies and procedures to their school communities."*

Many parents have experienced gaps in communication regarding the steps toward the new school year. In several incidents during Zoom webinar sessions about reopening, District or school representatives filtered questions by participants, and in some cases, gave inadequate, incomplete and/or glib responses. Additionally, several questions from parents were left unanswered during these informational sessions, and Town Hall hosts did not provide instructions on where participants could send unanswered or subsequent questions. Town Hall hosts also failed to provide information on COVID Questions and Compliance hotlines, or that each school is required to have a COVID Compliance Task Force. This inadequate communication exacerbates the anxiety that parents feel about our children returning to school, and reinforces the belief of some that the District prioritizes enrollment over our children's health and safety. The District should address these issues, in part through the following measures:

- Consistent communication, with relevant sourcing and citations, by District decision-makers, including regular videos by the Superintendent, Town Halls, and multilingual surveys.
- Provide protocol guideline documents that are easy to understand, accessible, translated, and uniform. These should specifically address school protocols in the event of an outbreak, quarantines, and student absences.
- Promote accessible accountability measures for parents, students and educators to submit questions and complaints. Parents must know how and where they can report incidents of protocols not being followed. COVID hotlines and COVID Compliance Task Forces must be well publicized and the District must take adequate measures to address non-compliance.

Health and Safety Protocols

The District's 2021-22 reopening appears to lack a real-time acknowledgment of the Delta variant and how it impacts the plan to return to school. COVID is no less dangerous than it was during the Spring when schools reopened. Yet many decision-makers have been lulled or pressured into an over-optimism about reopening because of increased vaccinations. And now LAUSD no longer has a school specific distance learning structure and is expecting a dramatic increase in the number of students returning to in-person schooling compared to the Spring - which will undercut each school's ability to maintain social-distancing. LAUSD should maintain strict health and safety measures, not roll them back while a large number of students remain unvaccinated. The District should address these issues, in part through the following measures:

- Provide clear protocols for daily procedures and emergency situations. For example:
 - Entering school campus on a daily basis;
 - What are the specific metrics LAUSD is following to keep schools open? In April 2021, the District had to be below 7 positive cases per 100,000 people in LA County to permit open schools. Despite a surge in COVID infections in LA County, District representatives have not stated the metrics it is following;
 - What are the thresholds for any class or school closures for outbreaks;
 - What are the guidelines for notifying families of COVID infections and/or outbreaks;
 - Who has to "quarantine" and when should someone "quarantine".
- LAUSD should ensure that COVID testing sites remain accessible for students AND their families. The District should maintain testing capabilities, not decrease them, and help to mitigate any challenges to testing such as limited transportation for some families.

High-quality, comparable alternatives for distance learning

The District has provided City of Angels as the only remote option for "anyone who isn't ready to go back," as represented by a District official during a recent Townhall. City of Angels functions as its own independent school and it appears that the District did not envision a large segment of the school community to enroll in it. It also appears that City of Angels is intended for a specific group of immunocompromised students and families. As a result, families with students who are in specialized programs, such as dual-immersion, VAPA, magnet, special education, etc. at their home school, are concerned that their students will not retain their usual curriculum. Some parents have been informed by principals that students who are enrolled with City of Angels will not maintain their space in their home school.

City of Angels is an extremely limited option for parents and the District has not provided enough information about how this option can meet the learning needs of our children. Instead, the District has been assertively encouraging families to opt for in-person schooling, based on the "expectation" that the vast majority of students will return to campus. The District does not

appear to be prepared for the potentiality that a substantial proportion of families will opt out of in person learning. Families that choose online distance learning should not feel like the District is punishing them for deciding against in-person learning. Instead, the District should:

- Outline specific stipulations for City of Angels eligibility. During various town halls, representatives from the District presented City of Angels as “an online Independent Study Program that will also be available for families with medical, social-emotional, or other concerns.” Yet with seven (7) days until the first day of school, families have not been notified about their acceptance into CoA. In another instance, a Parent Educator Coach from the Office of Parent and Community Engagement informed a parent that families must “request an IEP to attend City of Angels.” However, an IEP requirement was never mentioned in Town Halls, online guidelines, or other communications.
- Work with parents to ensure the City of Angels provides ways to meet the various learning needs of our children, such as enrichment programs and tutoring.
- Explore other alternatives for distance learning beyond City of Angels, recognizing that teachers should not have the onus of teaching two groups of students full-time (in-person and distance learners).

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you. We are requesting to schedule a meeting with you and the members of your administration charged with managing COVID safety, family communications and distance learning at the earliest possible date.

Sincerely,

Vicky A. Martinez
Parent, Aldama ES & Franklin
Dual Language MS/HS

Brenda Del Hierro
Parent, Luther Burbank MS
San Pascual ES, Eagle Rock ES

Teresa Gaines
Parent of 2, GrandView Blvd.
ES Dual Language Spanish

Bridget Gordon
Parent, Richland Avenue
School

Alejandra Delgadillo
Parent, North Hollywood HS
HGM

Eric Ryan
Parent, GrandView Blvd. ES
Dual Language Spanish

Rose Reiss
Parent, Paul Revere MS

Maria T. Valdez
Dual Lang. Teacher, 4th St. PC

Lorraine Wallis
Teacher, Garfield HS

CC: Board President Kelly Gonez
Board Vice President Nick Melvoin
Board Member Monica Garcia

Board Member Scott Schmerelson
Board Member Dr. George McKenna III
Board Member Jackie Goldberg
Board Member Tanya Ortiz-Franklin
UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz
ACCE Campaign Director Amy Schur
LAANE Education Director Rudy Gonzalves
Students Deserve Director Joseph Williams
Reclaim Our Schools LA Director Billy Easton