



**COUNCILMEMBER CHRIS CATE
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
SIXTH DISTRICT**

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: July 28, 2020

FROM: Councilmember Chris Cate

SUBJECT: Proposal for In-class and Distance Learning Options

The City of San Diego's Sixth Council District includes the neighborhoods of Clairemont Mesa, Kearny Mesa, Miramar, Mira Mesa, Rancho Peñasquitos, and Sorrento Valley. District 6 residents are served by two school districts, seven high schools, eight middle schools, and 24 elementary schools.

The Global COVID-19 Pandemic has dramatically affected the way we all work, conduct business, parent, and learn. Unfortunately, the most impacted of our population are students, who, as a result of public health orders, were required to quarantine, stay away from their friends, quit sports and clubs, and distance learn for the remainder of the year with the hope of returning to class and normalcy after summer break. Isolation is taking a serious toll on the emotional and mental health of young people, and children are falling behind scholastically. Since school closures in March, reports are that about 50% of students from low income families didn't log on even once for distance learning. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) are stressing the importance of allowing children to safely return to in-class learning.

On July 13th, the San Diego Unified School District announced that it would not open schools for in-person learning for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Upon receiving this news, families across San Diego began frantically scrambling to enroll their children in private and parochial schools. However, on July 17th, Governor Newsom issued an order preventing all schools in counties on the Monitoring List, including San Diego County, from conducting in-person learning without a waiver, again sending parents and teachers into a panic to figure out how to provide quality education and safety to children for the foreseeable future.

In response to the concerns being voiced by parents and teachers, I would like to propose a host of solutions both for in-person and distance learning to ensure:

- Students receive the quality education they are entitled to
- Parents are able to go to work and provide for their families knowing their children are being supervised
- Teachers have flexibility in the way they serve their students

In-Person Learning Solutions

- **Waiver Request:**

From June 18th to July 18th, five emails were sent to San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) families soliciting input for the 2020-2021 school year. Sadly, on July 13th, SDUSD announced that it would not be reopening schools for in-person learning on August 31, 2020, the first day of school. Per the California Department of Health, schools located in non-Monitoring List counties, *may* apply for waivers for in-person instruction. Local health officers may grant a waiver to allow elementary schools to reopen for in-person instruction if the waiver is requested by the district superintendent in consultation with labor, parents, and community-based organizations. Several public, parochial, and private schools in San Diego have already released communication to their school communities expressing their intent to apply for such a waiver. Furthermore, months of preparation, planning, and safeguards have been implemented by these school campuses due to robust input from families. Safety measures for teachers, children, and faculty have been paramount at these schools with the intent of having in-person learning. Some examples include the installation of plexiglass barriers and ventilation filters, codifying temperature check procedures, and expanding the frequency of deep cleaning at each of these schools. Yet, on July 21st SDUSD officials stated they had no plans to apply for such a waiver.

I am requesting that SDUSD consider applying for a waiver after San Diego County has been off the Monitoring List for fourteen days.

- **Open Air Classrooms:**

Open air schools were established as educational institutions for children to prevent and combat the widespread rise of tuberculosis that occurred in the period leading up to WWII. The schools were designed to provide open-air therapy so that fresh air, good ventilation, and exposure to the outdoors would improve children's health. Per the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, San Diego ranked first with 261 "pleasant" days, defined as having an average temperature between 55 to 75 degrees, minimum temperature above 45 degrees, and no significant rain or snow. Dovetailing that to the City of San Diego's current policies related to businesses, non-profits, and faith-based groups, open air classrooms encourage all operations to move outdoors. The City of San Diego is currently considering the feasibility of utilizing public parks and open spaces as an option for schools.

I am requesting that SDUSD consider moving all students from an inside learning environment to an outside setting, reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19.

- **Staggered Start Times:**

The Centers for Disease Control highly recommends a “staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes” to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Staggered start times decrease the sheer number of kids, parents, and families congregating at any given time for drop off/pick up while also ensuring ample time for temperature checks and standard operating procedures to enter campus. For example, half of the students could arrive in-school at the first bell, and then the other half at the second bell. Schools could divide students based on grade levels or alphabetically, in an effort to keep siblings on the same drop off/pick up schedule. This would permit all students and families who prefer in-person instruction daily, the opportunity to do so.

I am requesting that SDUSD consider staggered start times for schools, giving children an opportunity for in-person learning.

- **Homeschool Stipend**

Currently, the state of California offers parents who homeschool their children somewhere between \$2,600 to \$3,200 annually in tax dollars for educational funds. A statewide homeschool or distance learning stipend could be administered to all families transitioning their children to at-home learning. This stipend could be used to provide for school and technology supplies, such as new computers or tablets, internet service, at-home school supplies, or tutors for students. With the switch to distance learning, many families may not have the materials or devices needed to effectively study at home. Additionally, there are countless families who depend on after-school providers or local libraries for access to technology and the internet. A statewide homeschool or distance learning stipend would help offset this cost for families.

- **In-Class Assistance:**

The Coronavirus pandemic has created both an economic and educational crisis. According to a recent report, students are in danger of the “COVID slide” which is potentially worse than the usual “summer slide”. Concurrently, recent college graduates are having a difficult time finding employment as unemployment rates rise. At the same time, a number of teachers are uncomfortable returning to in-person classes as they may be part of the vulnerable population. A potential viable option is allowing young college graduates to go into the schools in conjunction with district teachers working remotely. This would allow district teachers to teach safely through a virtual platform while allowing each college graduate the ability to assist teachers by being present to pass out papers and supplies, or by simply being the “adult presence” in the classroom. This would likely work both economically and educationally by providing jobs for recent graduates as well as a safe place for students to continue in-person learning. This will also assist low-income families by reducing the financial burden of having to provide home-schooling.

Research has shown that, “although, children and adolescents play a major role in amplifying influenza outbreaks, to date, this does not appear to be the case with SARS-CoV-2. The preponderance of evidence indicates that children and adolescents are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe disease resulting from SARS-CoV-2 infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection.” The American Academy of

Pediatrics has come up with “guidance for school re-entry that starts with a goal of having students physically present in school.”

I am requesting that SDUSD consider the option of utilizing “In-Class Assistants,” giving children and families the opportunity for in-person learning.

Distance Learning Solutions

- **Re-open Public Libraries**

Whether children are able to return to school in-person or continue distance learning at home, the need for adequate access to educational resources and a safe place to learn are greater than ever. Children need a quiet, safe, and equipped place to effectively learn so they do not fall behind academically. Also, students now have a greater need for access to educational materials, such as books, periodicals, and computers, things they would typically have access to on campus.

I am requesting that the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego draft a plan to safely re-open all public libraries as soon as possible while following County Public Health guidelines for reducing the spread of COVID-19.

- **Temporary Moratorium on AB5 Provisions for Education Contractors**

In September 2019, the California legislature passed and Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law, AB 5—legislation adopting the so-called “ABC test” for determining whether a given worker is an independent contractor or statutory employee under the California Labor Code. Since the implementation of AB5 on January 1, 2020, thousands of independent contractors across all sectors have been displaced and lost income. Among those negatively impacted are nannies, tutors, and childcare providers.

Governor Newsom’s order on July 17th of prohibiting schools in counties on the Monitoring List from having in-person and on-campus learning in the coming school year has left parents with the monumental challenge of having to find appropriate care for their children while they continue to work and provide for their families. It is unrealistic to assume parents will be able to assist their children with full-time distance learning while maintaining a full-time job indefinitely. It is equally unrealistic to assume children can be left at home alone all day without supervision and care.

I am requesting a temporary moratorium on the mandates of CA AB5 for contract work related to childcare and education until all regulations regarding the pandemic are repealed. This action will allow parents, qualified educators, and caregivers to engage in mutually beneficial contracts to aid in the state mandated distance learning children are navigating.

- **Childcare and Education-related Tax Credit:**

San Diego and the State of California were already in a childcare crisis even before this pandemic hit. In San Diego County, it is estimated that 60% of children ages 0-5 have parents that work outside the home with another 577,000 children aged 0-12 that live in San Diego County. Due to the recent announcement of school closures across the state, the strain for affordable childcare and

the need for in-home learning has compounded the crisis. Families throughout the state are now faced with the serious predicament of not having suitable childcare for the workday or infrastructure for in-home learning.

I am requesting that the state adopt a temporary two-year Child Care and Home Education tax credit of up to \$5,000 per household. While many working families have access to a Flexible Spending Child Care account related to Child Care expenses, far too many do not have this employment benefit. Moreover, these expenses do not cover home educational purposes that millions of families across the county will now need. This tax credit will help augment the unforeseen childcare and in-home education expenses that the COVID-19 pandemic has created and give families the ability and flexibility to ensure their children are safe and given the best opportunity to avoid falling behind in their education.

- **Remove Cap for Public Charter School Enrollment and Update Per-pupil Funding to Current Enrollment**

SB98 caps student enrollment at public schools, thereby denying parents the opportunity for school choice, including public charter schools. According to the APLUS+ Network Association, an association of 85 non-classroom-based California charters that specialize in personalized instruction, approximately 300 of California's 1,300 publicly funded charter schools are classified as "non-classroom-based." Non-classroom-based publicly funded charter schools include home school, online, and hybrid models with instruction from a credentialed teacher. Acceptance into these schools are typically on a first-come, lottery system. Currently, there are 13,000 students on a waitlist for a public charter school.

Public schools are funded on a per-pupil basis. A snapshot for funding of all public schools taken back on February 29, 2020 is unreliable and inaccurate, in that it does not reflect the funding needed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents and students deserve the opportunity to choose a different public school if they feel it would better accommodate their needs and, as such, funding for the school should correlate directly to student enrollment.

I am requesting the removal of the provision in (SB98) placing a cap set on charter schools as well as requesting the restoration of per-pupil funding for all growing district and charter schools for the 2020-2021 academic school year.

Learning loss will be a significant unintended consequence of school closures if we do not find ways to continue providing quality education and safety for our children. For example, it took two years for students affected by Hurricane Katrina to recover from their lost learning. We don't want the same thing to happen in San Diego. School closures also hurt the economy. Parents can't easily pick up their children and go back to work if they have no place to put their children. Finally, the reality is there is no way San Diego can completely reopen its economy if schools are still closed. For all of these reasons, we need to rethink education and get creative in the ways we can serve our students now.