

Representing faculty
and classified workers in
public and private schools
and colleges, from early
childhood through higher
education

December 16, 2020

The Honorable Toni Atkins
Senate President pro Tempore
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker, State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

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American Federation of
Teachers, AFL-CIO

Dear Pro Tem Atkins and Speaker Rendon:

California teachers and classified school employees want nothing more than to return to our classrooms and know there is no equal substitute for regular, in-person learning. We miss our students and want to be back in our classrooms in a manner that both meets the educational needs of our students and keeps our members, our students, and our communities safe.

Legislators and the Administration will soon consider crucial questions of both educational equity and public health through pending legislation and work on the 2021-22 budget. This critical work is being undertaken as cases of COVID-19 continue to skyrocket across the state, along with record hospitalizations and deaths.

We cannot support our schools being reopened in a manner that is unsafe for students, teachers, staff, or their families. The teachers and classified professionals of CFT ask that science and community safety, not political pressure, be the guiding force in any discussion about reopening our schools to in-person instruction.

On behalf of the 120,000 education professionals that CFT represents, and given the deadly reality that we are in the midst of the third wave of the pandemic, we write to call attention to specific concerns we have with AB 10:

- AB 10 has been introduced during the most dangerous time of the pandemic. December 15, 2020 — just this past Tuesday — was the deadliest day of the pandemic in California's history to date. Two hundred and ninety-five Californians lost their lives on a single day, tragic proof that we are in the midst of a surge that shows no signs of abating. Our state has experienced over 21,000 deaths and over 1.6 million positive cases, and the numbers continue to grow.



- AB 10 sets an arbitrary date for schools to reopen for in-person instruction. Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, health experts at the state and federal levels have insisted that decision-making be guided by metrics and benchmarks, rather than by political pressure. Setting a March 1, 2021, date to reopen schools to in-person instruction does just the opposite. It is an arbitrary date that does not take into account infection rates or any other scientifically-grounded data that could help make an informed case as to why or why not schools might reopen at that time. At present, no statewide tracking system that accounts for which schools have reopened and which have not and that provides a complete data set of outbreaks and positive cases in schools exists, and assigning a future date for school reopening without gathering and assessing the necessary data to inform that decision invites unnecessary risk.
- AB 10 doesn't include the necessary planning or resources to safely reopen schools. There is not a plan for providing adequate PPE to school sites, nor is there any discussion of how a testing and contact tracing regimen for schools might be implemented, nor any mention of appropriate social distancing or cleaning protocols. All of these things are necessary and must be adequately funded to ensure the safety of our school communities.
- AB 10 doesn't take into account that a sizable percentage of low-income students or students of color will likely not return to school even if able to do so. These communities have been hit hardest by COVID-19, and recent examples and surveys have highlighted the extent to which Black and Latino parents, in particular, do not have confidence that their children's safety will be guaranteed in reopened schools. In New York, when schools reopened, more white students returned to in-person school than their Black cohorts, despite making up the smallest share of the school population. And a recent survey by the CDC showed that Black and Latino parents were less likely to send their school-age children back into the classroom than white parents. We cannot allow educational inequity to flourish in California, and a rushed move to reopen schools before health and safety protocols are in place would likely have this outcome.
- AB 10 ignores disparities amongst and within counties and removes local control. It makes a blanket statewide demand, even though we know that county case rates vary wildly. Globally, school reopening has been based on a below 5% infection rate which in California means that schools could reopen once their counties are in the Orange Tier or lower. This will happen at different times in different counties, and accommodations must be made for that reality.

We are in the midst of a public health crisis that has turned into a public education crisis. The blame for much of this failure can rightly be directed at the federal administration, which has failed time and time again to provide both the guidance and the funding that states and counties need to weather this storm and make sound decisions. And we recognize the incredible efforts of so many of Californians leaders, from the Governor and his team, to the legislature, to county health officials.

In June 2020, CFT published a [checklist for safely reopening schools](#), and we sent [a series of letters](#) in July, August, and September of this year to the Governor and the legislature, identifying the health and safety practices that we believe must be in place for schools to safely reopen for in-person instruction. We look forward to using this framework as a starting point to work together with you on a comprehensive plan, one that is informed by science and data, to reopen our schools safely for in-person instruction.

The State of California has a responsibility to secure the health and wellness of every resident. We, the CFT, have a responsibility to our members, our students, and our communities to advocate for a safe educational environment and we will continue to advocate on behalf of that responsibility. CFT members are eager to work with you to craft a plan that provides a safe, high quality education to the students and school communities to which we have dedicated our careers.

Sincerely,



Jeffery Freitas, President
California Federation of Teachers, AFT, AFL-CIO

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cc: Hon. Governor Gavin Newsom
Hon. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
Assemblymember Phil Ting
Assemblymember Kevin McCarty
Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell
Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez
Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi
Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan
Assemblymember Tasha Boerner Horvath
Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris
Senator Connie Leyva
Senator Anthony Portantino
Senator Nancy Skinner
Senator John Laird