



February 22, 2022

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Governor's Office  
State Capitol, First Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

Throughout the pandemic, we've communicated the need for clear, consistent, and evidence-based guidance for COVID-19 mitigation measures in public schools. A clear, objective rationale for any state mandate is critical for school boards and school staff as they work to explain and implement public health directives from Sacramento.

You've no doubt seen that elected school board members are experiencing unprecedented public pressure from the COVID-19-related measures mandated by the state. Much of the frustration stems from a lack of clarity about the path for public schools as we navigate this latest phase of the pandemic. As such, we urge your administration to provide governing boards, superintendents, parents, and the public with a specific K-12 exit strategy.

The COVID-19 mitigation and relief measures your administration recently implemented for schools are set to expire on March 31, including your recent executive order on 30-day emergency substitute credentials, student teachers, long-term substitute assignments, and financial incentives for retiree teachers. In addition, governing boards and superintendents require clear direction on the future of independent study and remote learning once Assembly Bill 130 sunsets. Finally, as you've surely noticed, compliance with universal school masking rules is fraying in various parts of the state.

Absent a dramatic and unexpected reversal in school-specific data, the appropriate time to unveil this exit plan is the February 28 press conference where California Health and Human Services will provide an update on COVID-19 mitigation in California schools. School boards, school staff, students, and families — as well as your administration — would benefit from signposts indicating the off-ramps for these pandemic policies and whether they will expire.

At his February 14 press conference, Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. Mark Ghaly offered statistics to illustrate the progress California is making in containing COVID-19. Dr. Ghaly specifically noted the significant decline in case rates, test positivity,

hospitalizations, and other key indicators over the past month. He also made it clear that these same positive trendlines influenced your decision to lift the mask mandate on February 16 in almost all indoor public places, except for schools and other settings like prisons and skilled nursing facilities.

Given this logic and the positive trendlines, it is time to present an exit strategy for K-12 schools so governing boards and superintendents can prepare for the upcoming changes and ensure that their local communities are fully apprised of the timeline and the reasons for it. This will be helpful in areas like the school masking debate. Some school districts, prodded by their community, have expressed a desire — and in certain instances have taken action — to indicate they are no longer strictly enforcing the state's mandate. Agitation has grown, stoked by the fact that masking restrictions have been softened or lifted in most areas of everyday life, yet remain in full force in California schools.

We will continue to advise local educational agencies to follow and uphold the law regardless of what decisions are issued on February 28. Nevertheless, a K-12 exit strategy is critical for trustees to retain confidence in the state's COVID-19 containment measures for K-12, and to help educate parents and the public about the reasons for the ongoing COVID-19 mitigation protocols. We think the additional clarity provided by such a plan would help reduce some of the frustration as it relates to state COVID-19 rules for schools, and allow school boards to govern without the chaos and disruption that's occurring at board meetings throughout California. Most importantly, it will help create the conditions for a more sensible and productive learning environment for students in California's public schools.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dr. Susan Heredia  
President



Vernon M. Billy  
CEO & Executive Director