

September 29, 2020

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER
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Reopening Schools in Los Angeles County

Over the past three months, Los Angeles County has employed a multi-faceted response to protecting our residents, and specifically our most vulnerable populations. These efforts have been successful, as we have seen our case rate drop to its lowest rates since this spring, and our positivity rate reach the lowest levels yet. When the state introduced the tier system last month, the County made the decision to delay any additional reopenings to allow our rates to continue to drop and protect against the risk of any increase from Labor Day. Now more than three weeks removed from the holiday, our rates are lower than before. Additionally, we are close to progressing into the state’s Tier 2.

At the same time, we have been closely monitoring the impact school closures have had on our children. While we have opened our schools for Individualized Education Programs, this has been limited to a small subset of our students.

While the county cannot fully open our schools until we advance into the state’s second

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tier, we do have the opportunity to allow waivers for elementary schools. This would allow us to provide limited in-person instruction for the ages of children who benefit most from in-person instruction.

The State, County and school districts have invested heavily in distance learning technology, however, gaps still exist that disproportionately impact minority communities. Just this past week, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of tens of thousands of Black and Latino children who claim they've been left without a basic education. All students are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). For many of our students most at risk, distance learning is neither free nor appropriate. Furthermore, the Los Angeles Times reported that LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner identified that the largest drops in attendance among young students is from the lowest income households. These absences will only exacerbate the learning gap between white students and minority students. The State of California reports that only 32.1% of the LAUSD's Black students and 38.7% of Latino students met English Language Arts standards, compared to 68.1% of White students and 76.3% of Asian students who met the standards. Additionally, only 20.2% of Black students and 27.5% of Latino students met the math standards, whereas 59.2% of White students and 72.5% Asian students met the standards.

Kindergarten enrollment in LAUSD is down 14%, and early attendance reports were that only 50% to 75% of students logged on. This takes into consideration that a student only has to email or text a teacher once per day, or only briefly log on once, to be considered present. These attendance challenges build on the remote learning limitations of the spring semester where only 60% of LAUSD students participated in

online learning.

As October approaches, it is critical that we begin the process of reopening our schools at limited capacity. Recognizing that the school waivers must go through the county and then be approved by the state, we must allow our schools time to slowly bring students, teachers and staff back to campus.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health to:

1. Implement the school waiver program for grades TK-2, starting at 30 schools per week, prioritizing issuance of waivers to schools with higher percentages of students qualified for free/reduced meals equally divided among the five supervisorial districts and any unclaimed waivers for any given week to be redistributed to schools with higher percentage of students qualified for free or reduced meals to reach the cap 30 schools per week irrespective of the supervisorial district;
2. Report back to the Board of Supervisors bi-weekly with updates on the waiver application process and compliance at reopened schools as well as any changes that ought to be made to the contact tracing workflow in order to improve the quality and quantity of data recorded with regard to school exposures; and,
3. Work with County Counsel to determine if additional measures should be taken to certify that all protocols have been properly implemented prior to school reopenings and include any compliance updates in the bi-weekly report backs.

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