



SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Agenda Item 7.3

Meeting Date: September 3, 2020

Subject: **Approve Resolution No. 3164: The Harms of School Closure and the Urgency of Reaching Near-Zero Transmission of COVID-19**

- Information Item Only
- Approval on Consent Agenda
- Conference (for discussion only)
- Conference/First Reading (Action Anticipated: _____)
- Conference/Action
- Action
- Public Hearing

Division: Board Office

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 33164: The Harms of School Closure and the Urgency of Reaching Near-Zero Transmission of COVID-19

Background/Rationale: The Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education supports efforts to reach near-zero transmission of COVID-19 in order to improve outcomes for youth in the community by ending school closure, ending educational disruption, and bringing back all services to students.

Financial Considerations: N/A

LCAP Goal(s): Family and Community Empowerment; Safe, Emotionally Healthy and Engaged Students

Documents Attached:

1. Resolution No. 3164

<p>Estimated Time of Presentation: 10 minutes Submitted by: Lisa Murawski, Board Member, Trustee Area 1 Approved by: Jorge A. Aguilar, Superintendent</p>
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Resolution No. 3164: The Harms of School Closure and the Urgency of Reaching Near-Zero Transmission of COVID-19

Whereas, on March 4, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist in California as a result of the threat of COVID-19; and

Whereas, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic; and

Whereas, on March 13, 2020, in collaboration with the Sacramento County Board of Education and other local districts, SCUSD announced the closure of all schools; and

Whereas, on July 17, 2020, Governor Newsom announced a California Department of Public Health framework that required all K–12 schools in California counties that met certain criteria related to COVID-19 infections to begin fall 2020 with distance learning; and

Whereas, school closures have caused, are causing and will cause significant harm to children; and

Whereas, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in society; and

Whereas, UNESCO notes, as of April 2020, schools had been suspended nationwide in over 190 countries, leaving 1.5 billion children out of education and leading UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay to warn “the global scale and speed of the current educational disruption is unparalleled;” and

Whereas, UNESCO lists the following adverse consequences of school closures: interrupted learning; poor nutrition; confusion and stress for teachers; parents unprepared for distance and home schooling; challenges creating, maintaining and improving distance learning; gaps in childcare; high economic costs; rise in dropout rates; increased exposure to violence and exploitation; social isolation; and challenges measuring and validating learning; and

Whereas, the unprecedented school closures as a result of COVID-19 must be understood by policymakers, public health professionals and the general public as having deep, intense, myriad and decades-long negative consequences for children, women, families and the broader community; and

Whereas, school closures impose academic harm; and

Whereas, a May 2020 working paper projects COVID-related learning loss for the 2019-20 school year means students are likely to return in fall 2020 with approximately 63-68% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year and 37-50% of the learning gains in math; and

Whereas, COVID-19-related distance learning is borne out of a public health crisis, compares unfavorably to in-person learning for the vast majority of learners and must not be misconstrued as equivalent to or an adequate substitute for in-person learning; and

Whereas, SCUSD data reflects elementary students experiencing homelessness and Black students were the least likely to have engaged 60% or more (at least three of five days per week) in distance learning in spring 2020, and foster youth students, English learners, students from low-income families, and certain Asian and Pacific Islander students were less likely than average to have engaged 60% or more in distance learning in spring 2020; and

Whereas, engagement of SCUSD high school students in distance learning, 60% or more was poor across the board in spring 2020, averaging around 40%, while only slightly over a quarter of students experiencing homelessness engaged in distance learning 60% or more; and

Whereas, school closures exacerbate existing inequities; and

Whereas, a continued lack of in-person learning is expected to have profoundly negative effects on the academic performance of vulnerable student groups who already experience disproportionately poor outcomes, including Black students, foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, English language learners and students with disabilities; and

Whereas, an August 2020 research review found in addition to vulnerable students, early elementary children are most at risk from the move to distance learning, as these grades provide younger students with foundational literacy and numeracy skills; and

Whereas, school closures negatively affect children's health and safety; and

Whereas, children experience unhealthy weight gain primarily during the summer months when they are out of school, and obesity researchers accordingly expect COVID-related school closures to exacerbate the risk factors for weight gain associated with summer; and

Whereas, school closures force some parents to choose between their job and their ability to ensure their children are supervised, raising the risk of children being left unsupervised or in the care of other children for significant periods of time, with attendant health, safety and developmental concerns; and

Whereas, thanks to dedicated nutrition services staff and a strong commitment from district leadership, SCUSD has been able to continue serving a large number of daily meals to children throughout our community to address a dramatic increase in food insecurity, yet some families cannot access meal sites and the expiration of federal flexibility to provide meals to all children 0-18 means access to free meals will now be significantly restricted; and

Whereas, school closures during the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic across several African countries are the most similar in duration and scope to current COVID-19 closures, and Ebola-related closures were shown to increase dropouts, child labor, violence against children and teen pregnancies; and

Whereas, school closures can result in social isolation in an abusive home, with abuse likely exacerbated at this time of stress and economic uncertainty, while referrals to child welfare services have plummeted since schools were closed due to COVID-19; and

Whereas, nearly one in ten SCUSD students responding to a survey in spring 2020 did not feel they had “at least one adult I can go to for support or help if needed;” and

Whereas, school closures harm children’s mental health and diminish feelings of belonging and connection; and

Whereas, according to YouthTruth.org, a national survey including California youth conducted in the midst of school closures in spring 2020:

- 70% of students reported they experienced obstacles to virtual learning, 64% of whom reported facing distractions at home as an obstacle and 50% percent of whom reported feeling depressed, stressed or anxious as an obstacle;
- On average, Black and Latino students faced more obstacles than White and Asian students;
- Fewer than one in three students said they really feel like part of their school community or feel connected to school; and

Whereas, a June 2020 rapid systematic review of literature on the mental health impacts of isolation and loneliness found a high likelihood of increased anxiety and depression among children and adolescents during and after enforced isolation for COVID-19, which may increase as enforced isolation continues; and

Whereas, school closures have profound and growing economic impacts on children and families and exacerbate gender inequity; and

Whereas, school closures force some parents to sever employment to care for their children, which can cause or exacerbate child poverty with traumatic and lifelong effects on children; and

Whereas, research shows child care needs related to school closures are forcing women out of the workforce at rates much higher than that of men, leading experts to project significant wage losses for affected women that not only result in immediate financial instability but will likely constrain their future prospects and earnings, as well as exacerbate the gender wage gap; and

Whereas, closures are expected to reduce schooling and lead to future losses in earnings for current students, with one recent working paper estimating the present-value loss in expected lifetime earnings to current students of the four-month 2019-20 COVID-19 school closures at \$21,158 per

individual student in high-income countries; which equates to over \$800 million dollars in projected lost earnings among current SCUSD students just due to the 2019-20 school closures; and

Whereas, SCUSD's ability to open schools is directly dependent on the level of community transmission and prevalence of COVID-19 and the public health infrastructure developed to control the disease; and

Whereas, a briefing paper from the Harvard Global Health Institute and the Edmond J. Sarfa Center for Ethics indicates **the single best policy to support school reopening prior to the development of a vaccine or treatment is suppression of COVID-19 to near-zero case incidence**, echoing opinions expressed by many prominent public health experts; and

Whereas, a confoundingly inadequate and sometimes actively harmful national-level response to the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impaired the nation's collective ability to control the virus, increasing the importance of strong, coherent and strategic state and local leadership; and

Whereas, national, state and county-level actions can either support or imperil the district's ability to re-open schools for in-person learning by affecting the level of transmission and prevalence of COVID-19, including through decisions regarding:

- Public health orders and enforcement of those orders;
- The provision of culturally, linguistically and generationally relevant and evidence-based public communication and education that effectively persuades people to adopt behaviors that will reduce transmission;
- The development of capacity to provide COVID-19 tests with rapid turnaround time and in sufficient number, and contact tracers in sufficient numbers and with sufficient training and linguistic and cultural competence to trace and control outbreaks of COVID-19;
- Provision of resources and adoption of policies to allow and encourage individuals to quarantine as recommended;
- Development and distribution of vaccinations to prevent COVID-19;
- Support for the implementation of health and safety protocols, testing and contact tracing for schools; and

Whereas, SCUSD stands ready to implement recommended public health protocols within its schools when community conditions allow for a return to full in-person instruction; and

Whereas, the total and daily number of COVID-19 cases and the percent positive tests are key metrics indicating success or failure to control COVID-19; and

Whereas, pursuant to California Department of Public Health July 17, 2020, guidance, and as modified by a new framework introduced on August 28, 2020, the state has adopted a threshold to indicate when COVID-19 case numbers and percent positivity are too high to reopen schools safely; and

Whereas, pursuant to the framework introduced on August 28, 2020, the state has indicated schools in counties at a “substantial” (red) risk level for a certain period of time may reopen unless prohibited by a stricter county order; and

Whereas, a “substantial” risk level equates to up to 98 cases per 100,000 people (14-day average) and a 5-8% test positivity rate; and

Whereas, though the state framework indicates schools *may* reopen in a county at a “substantial” risk level, there is no official recommendation on whether schools *should* reopen in a county at a “substantial” risk level, nor what values on the key metrics of number of COVID-19 cases and the percent positive tests are compatible with an appropriately safe and sustainable reopening; and

Whereas, clear, consistent and transparent guidance from state and county public health officials for the level of COVID-19 cases and the percent positive tests that indicate community conditions are compatible with reopening of schools at varying levels of public health precautions would allow for a shared evidence-based standard informed by public health expertise, instead of each district guessing at the appropriate level; and

Whereas, the state framework sets a minimum level of restrictions for each risk level, but counties may implement more stringent restrictions and take additional actions to control COVID-19; and

Whereas, we are guided in our decisions by the evolving science of the virus and the health, safety and well-being of our students and staff; and

Whereas, heated arguments throughout our country about whether schools should reopen in the midst of a raging pandemic are a distraction from the core issue, which is a collective failure to control the spread of COVID-19 and create the conditions under which our schools, businesses and civic infrastructure can reopen safely and sustainably; and

Whereas, children should not pay the price of adult failures; and

Whereas, the lifelong academic, social-emotional, developmental and economic trauma and the countless ripple effects caused by extended school closures should awaken all persons in every sector of society to their moral responsibility to prioritize achieving the low COVID-19 transmission and positivity rates necessary to reopen schools.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Board of Education calls on Governor Newsom, the California Department of Public Health, and Sacramento County Public Health to prioritize our children and schools during the period of school closures by taking the following actions:

- Adopting a plan to suppress COVID-19 cases, including a goal of reaching a near-zero case incidence by December 31, 2020, and a set of strategies that will result in reaching the goal by the timeline; and

- Rejecting changes to public health orders that are likely to increase community transmission of COVID-19 and thereby prolong school closures; and
- Put in place further restrictions and make further investments as necessary to control COVID-19; and

Resolved, that the Board of Education commends the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors for allocating significant resources to the local public health effort to fight COVID-19, and encourages further investment as necessary to suppress the virus in our community as quickly as possible to meet a goal of reaching a near-zero case incidence by December 31, 2020, which will both facilitate the reopening of schools and allow for an honest and sustainable economic recovery; and

Resolved, that the Board of Education requests Governor Newsom, the California Department of Education, the California Department of Public Health, and Sacramento County Public Health to collaborate with educational partners to define appropriate metrics and levels whereby it is deemed not only *allowable*, but *appropriate* to reopen schools under various levels of public health protocols; and

Resolved, that the Board of Education calls on business and community leaders and all persons across Sacramento County, the State of California, and the United States of America to prioritize the needs of children, women and families throughout this crisis and support actions needed to achieve the low COVID-19 daily case rates and test positivity rates necessary to reopen schools; and

Resolved, that copies of this resolution shall be distributed to relevant parties.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education on this 3rd day of September, 2020, by the following vote:

AYES: _____
 NOES: _____
 ABSTAIN: _____
 ABSENT: _____

ATTESTED TO:

 Jorge A. Aguilar
 Secretary of the Board of Education

 Jessie Ryan
 President of the Board of
 Education