

# Free COVID-19 Testing and PPE Should Be Available for All School Employees and Students Before Re-Opening the Schools

## Whereas:

Universal testing for COVID-19 is fundamental to learning the real number of people infected by the disease, and therefore how to escalate the struggle to defeat it. Most importantly, universally available testing ensures that those who are infected, especially those who are asymptomatic, can be identified, isolate, and have their contacts traced and tested. Every major public health organization, beginning with the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the vital importance of mass testing. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) also released a *Plan to Safely Reopen Schools* which includes the need for increased COVID-19 testing.

Despite acknowledging the need to massively increase COVID-19 testing by politicians at every level, test availability remains pitifully low. California is ranked among the bottom half of the country in per capita testing for COVID-19 (California ranks 26<sup>th</sup>), according to data compiled by the COVID Tracking Project and the most recent Census Bureau numbers (Dylan Scott for Vox, May 11, 2020). In the Bay Area, getting tested for COVID-19 remains a major challenge, even for frontline workers.

COVID-19 has a particularly long incubation period before signs and symptoms of the illness manifest (ranging from 5-24 days). Without the availability of universal testing for people who are asymptomatic, countless people can inadvertently spread the illness to others. Added to the already serious and tragically fatal effects of COVID-19 that have been documented, scientists and physicians acknowledge that there is still a great deal they do not know about the virus, adding to the danger of the pandemic.

Schools are obvious places where massive community spread of illness takes place. Premature re-opening of schools will lead to another wave of the pandemic. This is an unacceptable risk to the lives and safety of our members, students, and families.

On May 6, 2020, the Oakland Education Association overwhelmingly approved a resolution by a vote of 83-9 stating: *"Therefore be it resolved that we will oppose any premature opening of the schools without such necessary safety measures. The OEA demands Mass Testing for all employees and students who want it and that OUSD provide universal access to proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)."*

As educators in our community's public schools, when we fight for the health and safety of our members, we are also fighting for the health and safety of our students and their families. We have shown time and again the power that we have when we unite and fight. We have that power right now to fight for the necessary health policies to be implemented from our local, state, and national government.

## **Therefore Be It Resolved That:**

1.The Berkeley Federation of Teachers (BFT) calls for freely available COVID-19 testing for all school employees and students, and for BUSD to provide universal access to proper personal protective equipment (PPE). We oppose re-opening our schools without these safety measures in place.

2.The BFT also calls on Governor Newsom to make free COVID-19 testing universally available to all school employees and students before giving the green light to open California's public schools.

3.The BFT will also take this resolution to the national convention of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) this summer. We will submit a version that makes these same demands on a national scale.

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