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Supervisor Ronen, Education Advocates, and California Elected Officials Urge Governor Newsom to Prioritize Public School Educators for COVID-19 Vaccine Access

SAN FRANCISCO: Today, San Francisco Supervisor Hillary Ronen convened a virtual press conference bringing together educators, parents, medical professionals, and elected officials from across the state to urge Governor Newsom and the California Department of Public Health to prioritize providing teachers and school support staff with COVID-19 vaccines so that cities are better equipped to safely reopen schools and get students back into the classroom quickly.

Communities all throughout California have witnessed the damaging toll that prolonged school closures have had on the learning and overall well being of students, especially students from low-income and immigrant families who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 health and economic crises.

“Schools have been closed for nearly 9 months now, and yet state officials have failed to prioritize enough resources to support safe school reopening,” said Supervisor Hillary Ronen. “If we don’t act now, these indefinite school closures will have a lasting impact on our students’ learning and development, further widening racial achievement gaps.”

Right now, California state health officials are developing a phased distribution plan to determine which segments of the population will be prioritized for receiving the COVID-19 vaccines first. So far, the state has only announced its first priority group to receive the initial wave of vaccinations, which include frontline health care workers and the residents and staff of long-term care facilities. It is still unclear where educators will fall under the state’s priority ranking, which will be decided over the coming weeks.

“Providing vaccines to all school site personnel, including teachers, paraeducators, librarians, counselors, nurses, janitors, and other school support staff, will be critical in our ability to safely reopen schools,” said Susan Solomon, President of the United Educators of San Francisco. “Vaccine access, along with proper testing, contact tracing, ventilation, PPE, and sanitation protocols, is another important measure for preventing school-based outbreaks and protecting students, families, and educators alike.”

Dr. Amy Beck, a San Francisco public school parent and pediatrician added, “Despite the heroic efforts of educators to teach remotely, ongoing school closures are nothing short of a crisis for children in California. Many children are struggling to learn in an online format and their mental and physical health is suffering. Current data and science do not indicate that all school staff need to be vaccinated for schools to reopen safely. When public health guidelines are stringently followed, schools have proven to be safe environments for children and adults. However, just as schools are



essential for children, school personnel are essential workers who should be prioritized for vaccination.”

Last week, Supervisor Ronen introduced a resolution before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors calling on the Governor and state health officials to provide educators access to vaccines following health care settings that serve medically vulnerable populations. In a showing of support behind these statewide advocacy efforts, legislators from cities and counties across the state including Oakland, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Fresno, Culver City, Sacramento, San Diego, and Contra Costa County are planning to introduce similar resolutions within their respective legislative bodies.

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia said, “Our teachers and school support staff are essential employees and should receive priority to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The sooner they are vaccinated, the sooner they will be available to return to our schools when they safely reopen. Many students, especially from lower income communities of color, are falling behind under the current instruction system. We can’t let that happen and need quick action by the state to support our teachers and school staff.”

Los Angeles City Councilmember Mike Bonin shared, “Getting our kids back in school, for in-person learning, is an urgent imperative. As a Dad to a first-grader, I know first-hand that even the best remote learning programs lack the academic, social and psychological benefits of being in a classroom, with fellow students and a teacher. During this pandemic, the needs of our children have too often been pushed aside. It has been a huge moral failing and a betrayal of low-income children, particularly kids of color. Prioritizing teachers and school support staff for vaccinations is how we begin to put our schools and our children first, and how we begin to right this wrong.”

“For decades, our school personnel, educators and support staff alike, have been hearing the state’s messages devaluing their professions as we have continuously stripped away resources while laying increasing blame on them for enduring achievement gaps,” stated Dr. Kelly Kent, a governing board member of the Culver City Unified School District. “It’s in this worldwide crisis that we have to reckon with the toll that has taken on their willingness to put themselves on the frontlines. Let’s work toward winning back their trust by showing them they are highly critical members of a functional, healthy, sustainable society by giving them the protection they need to safely return to the classroom.”

Oakland City Councilmember Nikki Fortunato Bas noted, “The disproportionate health and economic impacts of COVID-19 on Black, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American families, including high rates of job loss and COVID-19 infections, have only exacerbated the educational challenges and learning gaps that students of color have had to endure during this crisis. Working families are desperate to have their kids return to school, and ensuring immediate vaccine access for our school personnel will be key to making that possible.”

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A video recording of the press conference is available here:
<https://www.facebook.com/hillary.ronen/videos/10159525656362565>

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