



School And City Leaders Ask Governor To Prioritize Educators On Vaccine List

Educators and leaders statewide joined a forum Thursday to ask the governor to put educators next in line for vaccines.

By [Mission Local](#), News Partner

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Public school teachers have a lesson plan for the governor: Make educators a priority. On Thursday, Supervisor Hillary Ronen joined California leaders across the state to urge Gov. Gavin Newsom to put teachers and all school personnel toward the front of the line to receive the Covid-19 vaccine.

Oakland city councilwoman Nikki Fortunato Bas said, "Any discussion of schools reopening must include providing vaccines to all school site personnel, in addition to testing."

Ronen argued that the toll on teachers, parents, and students alike is having a lasting impact on kids, especially children in the most vulnerable populations.

"We need to get kids back in school as quickly as possible," Ronen said. "All adults should get vaccinated — educators, janitors, bus drivers, psychologists — and vaccinated as soon as possible."

For months, California public schools have remained online for fear of spreading covid, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data suggests [transmission risk among young children is low](#).

Right now, [the state is recommending](#) the first rollout of immunizations go to healthcare workers, and residents of assisted living facilities and long-term care settings.

Educators should be next in line, according to Thursday's speakers, which included Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia and Dr. Kelly Kent from the Culver City Board of Education. They and Fortunato Bas all plan to introduce resolutions urging the governor to prioritize educators for vaccinations next Tuesday, Dec. 15.

Los Angeles City councilman Mike Bonin said he had already put forth similar legislation on Wednesday.

The call to have all adults working in schools on the list was centered on safety, said Susan Solomon, the president of the teachers union United Educators of San Francisco. School workers like janitors, cafeteria workers, and assistant principals interact with students every day.

"We, again, want to keep everybody safe, including the people, the adults we depend on in order to do our work," Solomon said.

But the panelists emphasized that even after staff and faculty are immunized, schools should only be reopened with the proper safety measures. Adequate ventilation, personal protective equipment, and frequent testing — the state-recommended once per two months was a "nonstarter," Mark Sanchez, the President of the San Francisco Board of Education, added. He suggested more "constant and on demand" testing to ensure people feel safe.

When asked whether educators would actually take the vaccine, Gioia said safety measures, partnering with school districts, and support from an official state directive for local health departments to distribute vaccines to school faculty could help encourage them. Many teachers expressed fear of reopened schools due to their own health risks, [NPR found](#). And, nationwide, vaccines have been controversial; some are excited to get a vaccine, [while for a variety of reasons, others feel trepidation](#).

The current California vaccination plan does not include children as immediate recipients in its first phase.

Educators and doctors have worried about the potential loss of learning that online school has wrought. Teachers have expressed concern at students dropping out of classes and completing less work. Zoom-bombers created other distractions — a pair interrupted Ronen at the beginning of Thursday's call and had to be removed.

Sanchez, a fourth grade teacher, used his break during the school day to talk about how virtual school contributed to academic disadvantages; he said this has been the "hardest time" of his life as an educator and professional.

"This is where it all happens," he said, showing off his makeshift classroom. "It is not getting my kids anywhere near what they would get if they were with me in person," Sanchez said.

"We're going to be going into a new school year where so many of our students will not have the tools to move forward as they should, even notwithstanding the funding imbalance that we have," Sanchez said.

And, for underserved populations, the burden is worse, several speakers said, some attributing data from their districts or other studies. Data collected by a Portland

nonprofit showed a general decrease in math skills on test scores. But it found that [many Black and Latinx students didn't even take the test](#) they used to measure the scores, which the nonprofit attributes to possible inequity in virtual learning.

"The disparities that existed for most underserved and vulnerable populations before the pandemic have been exacerbated. And years of underfunding of public education and public services have added to this trauma," said Solomon.

The speakers also fretted about the psychological impact caused by lack of socialization and excess stress.

"Science has shown that without those daily therapeutic interventions from our caring adults, toxic stress can actually change the child's DNA," said Meredith W. Dodson, a public school parent and a social worker at the panel. "Any long-term effects on our learning and our hard working, loving teachers have been the only bright spot in learning."

Ronen said that she heard anecdotes from parents of a second grader who had never wet the bed before this year, and of a first grader that requested a teething ring to deal with online school anxiety.

And the virtual environment has exacerbated public educators' fears about disenrollment, as some parents are opting out of public school for private schools that have afforded to reopen in small cohorts. This is tacked on to what many of the speakers called "historic" underfunding by the state to public schools that need to be fixed.

"We recognize [choosing the vaccine recipients] is not an easy decision," Ronen said. "What we're saying is that we need to prioritize public education."

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