



# California Teachers Empowerment Network

*Standing out from the crowd, fully informed on the issues*

*Please note that in addition to the traditional emailing of the CTEN monthly newsletter, we will once again post it on the CTEN blog - <http://www.ctenteachers.blogspot.com/> As usual, there are several controversial issues covered in this letter and we urge you to share your opinions with other teachers.*

August 19, 2020

Dear Colleague,

Back-to-school time this year has obviously been severely skewed by the Covid-19 pandemic. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, Governor Gavin Newsom announced that all but a handful of schools in California would be closed.

But it was uncovered a few days later that schools could apply for a waiver to reopen, something Newsom mysteriously omitted in his July announcement. However, the waiver will not be granted easily. It must be requested by the district superintendent “in consultation with labor, parent and community organizations.” Then local health officers “must review local community epidemiological data, consider other public health interventions, and consult with CDPH when considering a waiver request.”

In other words, waivers will not be granted without having to jump through major hoops.

Interestingly, a recent poll conducted by the California Teachers Empowerment Network shows that many teachers don't agree with Newsom's stance. The survey found that 56 percent of teachers said that schools should open full time in the fall, while another 21 percent said that they would prefer the hybrid model – part in-person and part online.

To learn more, go [here](#) and [here](#).

Several education experts have suggested that we leave the reopening decision up to an individual school—its parents, teachers, and administration. Perhaps parents who are afraid to send their kids to school can be taught online by teachers who fear going into a school building. But parents and teachers who favor in-person education should be allowed to do so. Everyone gets their way with this set-up. Each family and teacher should have the flexibility to make a decision that affects them. There is no need for a gubernatorial edict or even majority rule in this matter.

It's important to note that the lack of in-person schooling is especially tough on low-income and minority kids. As the [CDC](#) claims, “These students are far less likely to have access to private

instruction and care and far more likely to rely on key school-supported resources like food programs, special education services, counseling, and after-school programs to meet basic developmental needs.” Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics, having weighed the pros and cons, maintains that [schools should reopen for in-person learning](#) for children’s overall well-being. And a [new report](#) by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine echoes similar sentiments.

Additionally, psychiatrist Carole Lieberman gives ten solid reasons why kids need to go back to school now:

*1- Ever since schools closed because of COVID-19, most kids have lost their enthusiasm for learning. Some kids, teachers and parents have convinced themselves that there’s still learning going on, simply for everyone to feel better.*

*2-Indeed, many kids stopped tuning into their zoom classes, and “dropped out” to spend time sleeping, watching TV or playing video games instead. But, they were given passing marks anyway and promoted to the next grade, leaving a large hole in the foundation of their education.*

To read on, go [here](#).

But many teachers are willing to strike if told they must return to school. To buttress support, the American Federation of Teachers has sanctioned “safety strikes,” announcing it will [help any local chapter](#) that decides to strike over reopening plans. While the AFT will not organize a national action, it would provide legal support and other assistance to local unions that vote to walk out.

To learn more, go [here](#).

At the other end of the spectrum, Adam Peshek, senior fellow for education at the Charles Koch Institute, wants to empower parents.

*There are reforms we should begin to adopt as soon as possible—such as focusing on small learning communities to continue in-person education. This is a step that some families are already taking—forming “learning pods,” micro-schools, homeschool cooperatives, and hiring teachers independently. Facing the pandemic threat, they are reimagining the “when and where” of the school day. This approach is one that puts education and kids’ needs first.*

*There are ways to begin to offer this approach to all families. Education funding can directly follow students, through proposals like offering education grants directly to families, or through education scholarship accounts. This could enable all families—not just those with financial means—to participate in learning pods and access outside learning opportunities.*

To read more, go [here](#).

As pundits dither over what to do in the near term, the future may look very different after the pandemic subsides. Scott Lewis, *Voice of San Diego* Editor in Chief, warns that an enrollment crisis is coming.

*If even 5 percent or 10 percent of parents don't send their kids to traditional schools this year, it would deliver a massive funding crisis for schools that have already [been grappling with enrollment declines](#). The deadline to lay off teachers has already passed. It is difficult to imagine how they can rearrange and cut costs swiftly enough to absorb the change. Especially with increased costs to deal with the health crisis on the horizon.*

*...The San Diego County Office of Education is advising districts to prepare for parents who are not comfortable sending their kids back to school yet. Some are worried that if they send kids to school, they may carry the coronavirus to a vulnerable relative. David Miyashiro, the superintendent of Cajon Valley Elementary School District, reported that hundreds of his families have left the region because of the economic catastrophe.*

*But there is also another challenge. Richard Barrera, a trustee for San Diego Unified School District, said that if the federal government (including the Republican-dominated U.S. Senate) does not bail out school districts like his, then next year they will not bring kids back to schools. Instead, they will continue doing distance learning as they have this year except [it will be a "lesser" version](#).*

To read on, go [here](#).

On a similar note, director of school choice at the Reason Foundation and ardent parent advocate Corey A. DeAngelis writes,

*Around [50 million](#) students were attending government schools before the closures. Even if only 2 percent of these families decide they want to continue homeschooling after the lockdown, that would mean government schools would lose nearly 1 million students. Because the U.S. [spends](#) around \$15,000 per child each year, on average, and because schools are partially funded based on [enrollment](#) counts, that loss of students could reduce government school funding by up to \$15 billion each year.*

*But that's not the only problem for government schools.*

*Families [fight really hard](#) to [keep](#) their educational freedom once they get a taste of it. In a sense, those who exercise school choice become their own [special interest](#) groups. For example, evidence suggests that thousands of low-income families benefiting from school choice programs in Florida [tipped](#) the governor's race in favor of Ron DeSantis in 2018. Families might similarly fight to take their children's education dollars back from the government school system in the [form](#) of [education savings accounts](#) to help offset the costs of homeschooling.*

To continue reading, go [here](#).

If you have any valuable resources that you would like to share, or report on what your school district is doing – good, bad or indifferent – to deal with the “new normal,” please do so by emailing [cteninfo@ctenhome.org](mailto:cteninfo@ctenhome.org) or posting on Facebook if you prefer. The CTEN page can be accessed [here](#), and the CTEN group can be found [here](#).

Best of luck to all of you, your families and your students during these very trying times.

Sincerely,  
Larry Sand  
CTEN President