

January 14, 2022

Dear Chancellor Claire and Presidents Moreno, Taylor-Mendoza, and Lopez:

We write to you as representatives of faculty to demand three safety measures we see as essential to allowing in-person instruction to continue this semester.

As you know, the number of Covid cases in San Mateo County is the highest it's ever been, and the case rate of San Mateo County is currently higher than the national average, with all indications suggesting it will continue to rise. Given this context, we demand these measures not only to protect faculty, staff, and students' health, but also to allow in-person instruction to continue as seamlessly as possible, to offer our students the best learning experience we can in the current circumstances, and to address our district's ongoing enrollment crisis.

You have undoubtedly heard about K-12 districts, like Hayward Unified and West Contra Costa Unified, that have already had to suspend in-person instruction due to massive numbers of exposures and positive test results, which have left these districts short of both staff and students. We want to see in-person learning succeed in our district. However, with the incredibly contagious Omicron variant, more robust safety measures are needed than are currently in place.

Just before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, AFT sent a short survey to all faculty asking anonymously about their Covid status, their recent exposures to Covid, and their comfort level with returning to campus. By 7 p.m. on Thursday, we had received 402 responses—nearly half our district's faculty. AFT has never had such a high response rate on any survey, let alone in a single day. **Of the faculty who responded, 59% said they felt "unsafe" or "very unsafe" returning to campus at present. In addition, 11% of faculty said they or someone in their household is currently experiencing Covid symptoms, 13% said they or someone in their household has tested positive for Covid within the past two weeks, and 31% said they have been exposed in the past two weeks to someone who has tested positive for Covid or is experiencing Covid symptoms.** These numbers demonstrate that robust safety measures are necessary not only to protect our community's health, but also to make in-person instruction sustainable throughout the semester.

As AFT, we urgently request:

1. **PCR and/or antigen testing must be available at each campus for any employee or student who wants it, on demand, and as often as they want it.** Presently, testing is guaranteed only for unvaccinated employees and students—not for those who are vaccinated and have been exposed, have symptoms, or simply want to make sure they are not infected before continuing to work in person, potentially exposing others. Many K-12 districts on the verge of shutting down have broadly available and even required testing—and they are still facing an almost impossible surge in cases. Readily available, on-demand testing is the only way to ensure that Covid cases on our campus are identified early, that individuals are able to isolate, and that in-person learning can continue.

2. **Basic safety equipment must be provided on demand.** The District must not only provide N95 masks for all employees, but also **provide N95 or KN95 masks for all students on demand.** The District should also share information with students indicating that N95 and comparable masks offer the best protection from Covid-19 for themselves and others. Finally, many employees work in small, windowless, or crowded spaces where ventilation and air filtration are limited. **The District must provide portable air purifiers fitted with HEPA filters on demand** to every employee who requests one.
3. **Employees must have the option to work remotely until San Mateo County moves out of the high transmission tier.** Faculty, whether instructional or non-instructional, and classified staff have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to perform their job duties remotely. Additionally, at Tuesday's Board meeting, ASSC President Anthony Tran emphasized that many students prefer temporary remote instruction, and that ASSC had taken an official position in favor of temporarily pivoting to remote learning. Like the faculty who responded to our survey—of whom 43% live with someone who is elderly, immunocompromised, or otherwise at risk of severe illness from Covid—many of our students live in multigenerational households and are reluctant to expose vulnerable family members to illness.

You are no doubt aware that many higher education institutions, including a growing list of California community college districts, are temporarily moving most classes and student services to a remote modality. In addition, other districts are giving faculty the option to transition to remote delivery at their discretion.

Allowing employees to work remotely until the County moves from the high to the substantial transmission tier will help protect the health of all in our community and allow students to stay enrolled in in-person classes—thereby ensuring the medium- and long-term sustainability of in-person learning in our district.

As classes begin on Tuesday the 18th, and many non-instructional faculty are already working on campuses, we ask that you respond to these demands by the close of business today, Friday, January 14, 2022.

Sincerely,

Monica Malamud for the AFT 1493 Executive Committee

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Monica Malamud
President / Negotiations Team Member
AFT 1493
aft1493.org