

Dear fellow UESF members:

As educators, each year, we wear so many invisible hats in addition to the ones in our official job description. Based on each moment's demand, we habitually shape-shift. We are nurses, food servers, counselors, friends, and even parents to needy students. This year, the hats have multiplied. We've had to become broadcasters, IT consultants, talk-show hosts, and tech support gurus. As many parents have shared, the connection to their teachers is the harness that has sustained children in the free-fall that the pandemic has been.

Yet, "epidemiologist" should not be a job title to adopt at this confusing time. Our jobs are hard enough, we should not be the ones deciding when to return to in-person instruction. We must trust our esteemed professional counterparts in medicine and the public health community. We should count on SFDPH to evaluate the district's plans and buildings and not allow any site to open before all the evidence-based precautions are in place. After all, we now have data to show that these precautions have proven successful at other schools and venues open to children for many months now. Bargaining for multiple additional demands sends the wrong message of not trusting the science. Isn't that what we hope our students will learn, to trust science?

When a fire alarm at a school site goes on, we calmly guide our students to safety until the firefighters arrive, analyze the situation, and announce that it is safe for all of us to return to the building. When there is a lock-down (another scary harbinger of the unhealthy times we live in), we let the police make the call, based on their professional judgment, when to lift it and return to the ever-elusive "normal." We do not argue with these specialists based on our own personal opinions and fears about when it is "safe to return." This is a medical emergency, and we must let the Department of Public Health decide when each of our schools should re-open.

Let us return to the classrooms to perform the essential public service of teaching. The data shows that too many of our students are failing to thrive in the virtual environment, and that schools can re-open safely. It is time to make that happen.

We hope others will consider joining us by signing this letter.

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