



**For Immediate Release**

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**Families Announce Citywide Petition to Reopen Schools For In-Person Instruction**  
*Frustrated Students, Parents, Teachers, Community Members, And City Leaders,*  
*Including Mayor London Breed, Announce Petition And Signature Drive*

**San Francisco, CA (February 4, 2021)** – Today, which marks the 104<sup>th</sup> day of the school year that public school buildings remain closed to children for their education, a group of parents, students, teachers, health experts and city leaders came together to announce a citywide petition to urge San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Labor Leaders and Board of Education Commissioners to come to an agreement to reopen schools for the more than 55,000 school children who have been experiencing the negative effects of distance learning for far too long.

One of the parent leaders of the group, Cliff Yee, a native of San Francisco and an SFUSD graduate, explained the rationale behind the petition and signature drive. “Nearly 11 months into our schools being closed, with our children suffering academic loss and emotional trauma, parents forgoing critical income to support distance learning, and our teachers working around the clock to keep students engaged without sufficient support,” Yee said, “there is still no agreement between the teachers union and the Board of Education for the safe return to school.” Thousands of San Francisco families and their children are frustrated and dismayed at the district’s lack of urgency as it relates to the safe return to in-person learning.

Kiah, a fourth-grader who attends one of SFUSD’s Spanish immersion programs, said, “I am struggling more than I would be in a real classroom. I miss school in person; it’s way less stressful. My classes are in Spanish and Spanish is not my first language... it’s really hard.”

At today’s event at Jose Ortega Elementary School in San Francisco’s Ingleside neighborhood, speakers also included Mayor London Breed, Senator Scott Wiener, Assemblymember David Chiu, Dr. Jeanne Noble (Director of UCSF’s COVID Response Unit), and several other frustrated parents, children, and teachers. Yesterday, in a separate action, City Attorney Dennis Herrera announced a lawsuit against the San Francisco Unified School District, alleging that it has violated State of California law in not providing a sufficient plan for the return to in-person learning for the district’s students.

Decreasing the Distance is a collective of parents and caregivers of SFUSD students who are committed to supporting one another and advocating for effective, equitable solutions during the COVID-19 education crisis and beyond.

**[www.decreasingthedistance.org](http://www.decreasingthedistance.org)**

Since last March, every public-school child in the SFUSD has remained entirely in remote learning, often home with parents who are simultaneously trying to work. In some cases, children are home unsupervised, as their parents must work outside the home. With inconsistent technology and WIFI, and lack of consistent support for remote instruction across SFUSD school sites, so many children are struggling, instead of learning and thriving.

SFUSD's Fall 2020 Attendance and Academic Performance data, released last week, showed Black, Latino, Asian and low-income students faring worse than in previous years when compared with their counterparts, furthering the already troublesome achievement gap in San Francisco. Public education should be the great equalizer of society, but instead we are enabling growing disparities and real life consequences as we keep schools closed.

Two mothers from the Mission district spoke together at the event about their children and their hope for the schools to reopen. Dheyanira Calahorrano said about her son, "After 10 months of virtual education, [he] is struggling with anxiety, depression, sadness due to the lack of socialization, and a lot of learning loss." Calahorrano also described how she has made an effort to organize 75 Latina moms from the Mission who, like her, "desperately need their children to return to school."

More than 17,000 children are learning in-person, surrounded by their peers, in San Francisco at this very moment. There have not been any outbreaks of COVID-19. There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a White House news briefing. At today's event, UCSF Emergency Room Physician and Director of COVID Response, Dr. Jeanne Noble, corroborated the point. "Back in March," Noble reminded, "we closed our schools because we wrongly assumed that children would be the primary drivers of COVID." She went on to assure, "we now have abundant evidence that schools are not COVID hotspots and can be operated safely."

Sam Cobbs, CEO of Tipping Point Community, one of the region's foremost poverty-fighting organizations, said "Education is one of the single best ways to break the cycle of poverty. Tragically, the pandemic has turned the achievement gap into a gulf. We need to move quickly to ensure that low-income families in public schools have the same education choices as their more affluent neighbors. Tipping Point and the philanthropic community stand ready to support a safe opening for all students in our region."

Parent Yvette Edwards closed out the event, with "The stakes are high, so is the fear, the loss. But we are calling on the union and district leaders to help us prevent what could easily become a lost generation of San Franciscans. It's not just their education that's in jeopardy, it's their future."

Families and students called on the greater city community to join them in solidarity, supporting their call-to-action and signature drive to urge our SFUSD labor and district leaders to come to an agreement, by the next bargaining deadline of February 18th, so that we can safely return our staff, teachers, and students to school buildings this spring.

A copy of the letter is here: [www.decreasingthedistance.org/media-resources](http://www.decreasingthedistance.org/media-resources)

To sign on to the letter: [www.decreasingthedistance.org/petition](http://www.decreasingthedistance.org/petition)

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