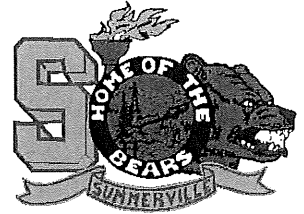


Summerville Union High School District

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Superintendent Michael Merrill

Board of Education * Hans deGroot * David Atkins* Randy Richter * Dennis Spisak * Bret Taylor

December 1, 2021

Governor Gavin Newsom
California Governor's Office
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sent Via Electronic Mail

Dear Governor Newsom,

My name is Michael Merrill and I am the Superintendent of Summerville Union High School District in Tuolumne County. We are a small rural school district of 650 students. Our district operates a comprehensive high school Summerville High School with an embedded dependent charter on campus Connections Visual and Performing Arts Academy in addition to several small necessary schools, an alternative school, Independent Study and Adult Ed program. Our schools offer a unique experience for our students and our community. Many of our families come from outside of our district boundaries as we are a school of choice due to our school climate, programs and staff and that allows us to have a nice blend of students on the high school campus.

That being said, we are faced with a very tough predicament if the vaccine mandate you have proposed goes into effect. We have surveyed our constituency and have found that of our incoming 9th grade families, 50% would leave the district and 12.5% would opt for Independent Study. Of our current 9th through 11th graders, 41% would leave the district, 20% would opt for Independent Study. 61% of our students would not return to Summerville High or Connections VPAA in-person learning if they are required to vaccinate. Our schools have been open for full in-person learning with 100% of our students on campus daily since early October of 2020 without any on-campus transmission of the COVID-19 virus. We are very proud of how our students, staff and our community have rallied around the importance of full in-person learning for our students. We know that the mental health of our students is still a big concern due to the anxiety around masking, uncertainty with the virus and how long it will be around, loss of jobs, loss of freedoms, and such. But we do realize that in-person learning is the best opportunity to reach our students academically, emotionally and socially by providing caring adults to work with them daily in the classroom, on the stage, in one-on one as well as groups settings and on the athletic fields.

Staffing a school, especially high schools, with such a variety of credential needs is a very difficult task in a good year. Amplify that with the potential of a vaccine mandate that will cause a mass exodus of students due to family choice and staff that will not return if mandated to

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vaccinate and have boosters. As a part of bargaining units for both certificated and classified staff, as well as non-represented staff, our Board will have to alert many staff of the potential for layoff by March 15, 2022. That will cause a huge wave in our small ocean in Tuolumne County. Our Board will have to take action to effect the layoffs by May 15, 2022. That means people will look for employment elsewhere and if anything changes we will not be able to staff our schools appropriately if students do return. Too much of this feels left to chance and hope. That is not how we run schools in California and I ask that you consider this as we are doing what we can to have schools open for in-person instruction, providing mental health support and preparing our students for this very uncertain future. These same students are scared and looking to us for support. We are also uncertain and trying to figure out how to plan for a very tumultuous future that is not looking financially sustainable amid decreasing enrollments and rising unemployment rates. Allowing for personal exemptions may be the best possible way to alleviate this firestorm if the vaccine mandate goes through.

If the state priority for education is in-person learning, it seems a vaccine mandate would directly conflict with this goal. Most of our staff has elected to vaccinate already, but some are wondering if they will be forced to get boosters. A majority of our families have made it clear through surveying and personal conversations that they feel that vaccinating their students is a personal choice and should not be mandated. If the only choice is to have a vaccination or leave the school, 61% of families have suggested that they will leave Summerville High or Connections Academy. That is not good for our students, our school and its programs, nor our community.

In solution, Summerville Union High School District based on its past practice of operating a safe school environment is requesting that the state stay with the voluntary vaccination for those that choose to do so and have the schools continue with the other mitigating factors that provide for safe in-person learning such as masking, social distancing as appropriate, regular handwashing, and sanitization of the classrooms, offices and vehicles.

It is my sincere hope that you, Governor Newsom, look at impacts of your proposed vaccine mandate as well as the state as a composite of rural, suburban and urban jurisdictions. Each may have a different need and treating them all the same is not what is best for each. I ask that you look at the statistics that Summerville Union High School District has provided and allow our rural county to make local decisions to best serve the needs of our students, staff, schools and community.

Thank you for considering our request, and I look forward to hearing from you before any final decisions are made in this regard, as the impacts of these decisions will be extreme.

Respectfully,



Michael S. Merrill
Superintendent Summerville Union High School District

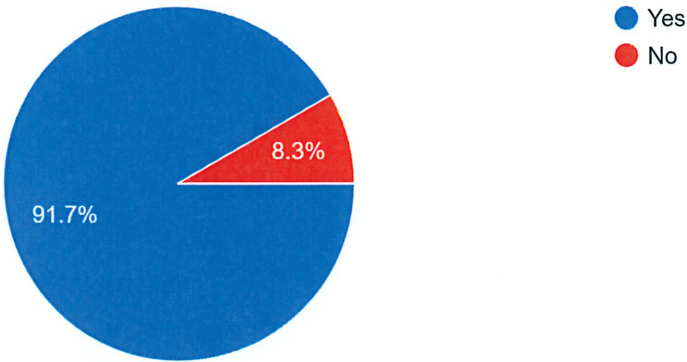
CC: Brooks Allen, Executive Director, California State Board of Education
Dr. Tomas Aragon, California State Public Health Officer
Toni Atkins, Senate Pro Tempore, California State Senate
Andreas Borgeas, California State Senator
Frank Bigelow, California State Assembly Member
Ben Chida, Governor's Office
Connie Leyva, California State Senator (Chair Education Committee)
Patrick O'Donnell, California State Assembly Member (Chair Education Committee)
Dr. Richard Pan, California State Senator
Anthony Rendon, Speaker, California State Assembly
Dr. Sohil Sud, California Department of Public Health
Dr. Eric Sergienko, Interim Public Health Officer, Tuolumne County
Tim Taylor, Small School District Association

Attachments:

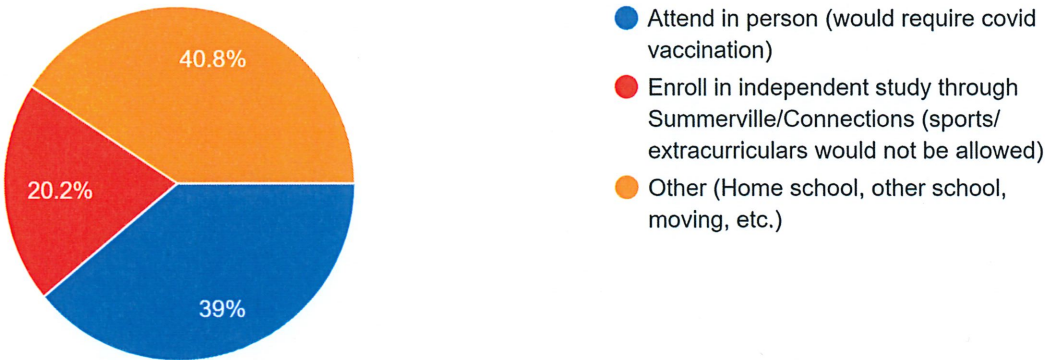
Data from Summerville Union High School District surveys

336 Responses representing 444 Students (95% of our returning student body).
Seniors were not included in the survey-

If personal belief or religious exemptions are allowed for students, will you continue to have your student on campus? If you plan to submit a personal...th your signature and student's name will suffice.
336 responses



If personal belief exemptions/religions exemptions for the Covid-19 vaccine are removed by the state legislature campus for 22-23 my student(s) will...
336 responses



Staff Survey-

- 44 responses

If the Covid vaccine is required for all staff for the 22-23 school will you return?
44 responses

