

Omicron-Driven Staffing Crisis Requires Action Plan

During the first week back after break, school staff worked hard to keep students safe and learning while experiencing a high number of absences due to the Omicron surge. It's already clear that increases in cases will result in unsafe environments at those schools hardest hit by COVID cases and quarantines. While some schools were able to function somewhat normally, others were racked with absences driven by COVID infections. That's why a one size fits all approach to this surge will not work.

To address the increased positive COVID cases and resulting staffing shortages, SDEA member leaders have been advocating for an emergency operation action plan that will give schools clarity on when they can no longer safely operate and must go online.

In addition to the emergency operational plan, SDEA member leaders have advocated for increased testing capacity, an expansion of COVID leave, and an improved effort to recruit and hire Visiting Teachers.

All Hands-on Deck and Elimination of Non-Essential Workload

Member leaders have also asked the District to put in place a plan that ensures that all available staff, including administration, are deployed to cover classes and to minimize the warehousing of students in large groups or provide adequate supervision when there is no other option but to warehouse students.

Additionally, SDEA member leaders met with District leadership about educator workload and District initiatives that could be suspended this year, including:

- Non-essential assessments and professional development being eliminated for the remainder of this school year.
- All site pilot projects that were not approved by the SGT must either be stopped or reviewed for approval by the SGT.
- Any scheduled PLCs that are not teacher directed should cease.

Deployment of Additional Safety Mitigations

Discussions with the District also included demands for:

Additional COVID Testing Site: The current testing site at the Ed. Center is highly impacted due to the surge in cases, and the UCSD drive up sites are at capacity. Labs processing PCR tests are also experiencing long delays. Despite these challenges, it's important to remember that the infrastructure in place took great effort to develop and that SDEA members fought hard for the testing program we have access to. Work is being done to expand capacity while also navigating the current surge which has impacted all testing sites everywhere. A 7-day testing site dedicated to staff is anticipated to be up and running on Wednesday in the Kearny Mesa area. Stay tuned for more updates.

Higher Quality Masks: The District has a stockpile of hundreds of thousands of KF-94 masks. It's important that they deploy these masks very quickly and efficiently. District leadership has made assurances that these masks will be widely available at schools this week.

Visiting Teachers: SDEA has proposed additional pay for day-to-day and long-term substitutes. We are unfortunately waiting on a response from the District on this proposal. It's imperative that we increase the VT pool in order to support school sites, especially during this surge.

COVID Leave: We will also be fighting for reinstating certain COVID leave rights that were provided by state law, but expired on September 30. Now more than ever, it's critical for the District to use the resources it has received in order to provide sufficient leave for educators. Further updates on this leave will be provided later this week.

FAQ's

Check your email for last week's Union Notes. Questions on COVID leave, testing, isolation, and COVID-related staff absences were addressed.

Q: I've tested positive for COVID. What do I do now?

A: The first step is to report your positive test result to Nursing & Wellness through this [form](#). After the district receives that information, a contact tracer should reach out and let you know your return date.

Q: How do I document my positive test so my absence is covered by our negotiated COVID leave?

A: If you were tested at a County or District site, you should receive an email with your test results. Using the form referenced above, report that positive result to the District's Nursing & Wellness Dept and a contract tracer should reach out with next steps. NOTE: *The District communicated this evening that at-home tests are sufficient for COVID leave. We have requested clarification on how to report results of such tests.*

Q: Why don't we call on SDUSD to shut down the whole district?

A: State law (SB 167) does not allow for school districts to close down or go remote without first exhausting all options and taking extraordinary measures to keep students in school. However, districts can and must come up with plans to determine when in-person operations may need to cease at an individual school with extremely high absences of staff.

Q: Why didn't educators get the take-home test kits provided to students? And why isn't the District providing them to educators now?

A: Those at-home test kits were provided by the State to school districts for distribution to students only. SDUSD was one of a few districts to receive them before winter break.

Q: Are Central Office staff being deployed to our most impacted schools to address the staff shortages?

A: In the coming days, the District plans to implement the [Substitute Procedures for Districtwide Emergencies](#) to deploy certificated staff, including site admin and central office staff, where needed.

Facebook Live with SDEA President and Vice President

Last Friday, SDEA President, Kisha Borden and SDEA Vice President, Kyle Weinberg presented an SDEA Live event with COVID updates on our Facebook page. You can watch the recorded video [here](#). Kisha and Kyle discussed important COVID updates related to staffing shortages, testing, masks, and more.

As conditions are changing rapidly and to provide additional updates, there will be another Facebook Live session later this week. Details will be shared soon.