

January 2021

Dear President Biden,

Despite the recent approval of two vaccines for emergency use, when, how, to what extent and for how long schools will reopen, remain unknown. There are over 50 million school age children in the United States. Since the pandemic began and schools closed or moved to remote learning, we have seen decreases in attendance and evidence of the potential for increases in mental health issues, among other negative impacts. Significant learning loss among students with different types of educational support is exacerbated in low income, black and Latinx student populations and among students with disabilities. Further, many of the gains made as a society on gender and racial equality are threatened as women are disproportionately shouldering the burden of homeschooling.

Decisions about reopening the schools have fallen largely to the local level. Schools are caught between often conflicting guidance by departments of education, health and labor as well as cities and state governments. Every school has had to navigate reopening, with administrators required to become experts in labor policies and public health measures in addition to managing educational outcomes. The pandemic has exacerbated existing teacher shortages. School districts have even smaller pools of substitute teachers to draw from when regular teachers are sick or quarantining. There has been a lack of funding to make the necessary physical and infrastructure adjustments needed to maintain distance and implementation of the recommended measures has been variable.

President Biden announced that he aims to re-open schools within the first 100 days of his presidency. As public health professionals, educators and parents of school age children, we believe we urgently need a united, authoritative voice that can provide a focused review of the evidence that exists that can inform a safe back to school by the April goal.

On behalf of dozens of public health professionals and educators, we call on the Administration to create an interdisciplinary task force in January focused on K to 12 education to inform the first 100 day plan. This task force should draw from multiple disciplines to set achievable goals, a roadmap to achieve them and metrics to monitor progress. It should also advise on policies with a focus on feasibility of implementation to ensure that kids in America have the best possible shot at education. Without this urgent action, we risk creating a set of circumstances that leaves every American child behind.

Sincerely,

Amy Adelberger, MPH, Managing Partner, Global Impact Advisors

Nina Schwalbe, MPH, Principal, Spark Street Advisors

Global Fund for Women

Georgia Global Health Alliance

Washington Global Health Alliance

Sara Anderson, MA, Executive Director, Bay Area Global Health Alliance

Neha Agarwal, MS, Board of Advisors, Bay Area Global Health Alliance

Cheryl Margoluis, PhD

Jonna Mazet, DVM, MPVM, PhD

Jonathan Kfoury, SM, Director, Bay Area Global Health Alliance

Nomita Divi, MSPH, Director, Ending Pandemics

Krista Donaldson, PhD, CEO Equalize Health

Alexandra Destler, EdM, Founder / CEO, SafetyNEST

Terry McGovern, JD, Harriet and Robert H. Heilbrunn Professor and Chair, Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health, Director, Global Health Justice and Governance Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health

Peter Hansen, PhD, Associate, The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, MD

Francesca Adair, MA, MFT, LPCC, NY, NY

Stephanie Perlman, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Weill Cornell Medical College, NY, NY

Jo Ivey Boufford, MD, Clinical Professor of Global Public Health, New York University, NY, NY

Daniel Hurewitz, PhD, Associate Professor, History, Hunter College, City University of New York (CUNY)

Regina S. Peruggi EDD, President Emerita, Marymount Manhattan College, NY, NY, President Emerita, Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY

Jennifer Elias, Assistant Professor, Economics, Radford University

Lisa Cohen, MA, Senior Advisor, Uncommon, Founder, Washington Global Health Alliance

Adrien de Chaisemartin, Director of Strategy, Funding & Performance, Gavi the Vaccine Alliance

Suzanne Walsh, JD, President, Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina

Gabrielle Fitzgerald, MPA, CEO, Panorama, Seattle, Washington

Anand Reddi, MD, MS, Director, Bay Area Global Health Alliance

David Fleming, MD, Senior Vice President Public Health, PATH, Former Deputy Director CDC, Former Director and Health Officer, Seattle King County Department of Health

James H Spencer, PhD, Professor of Urban & Regional Planning, Louisiana State University, Adjunct Senior Fellow, Environmental Change, Vulnerability and Governance Program, The East West Center

Anne Hyre, CNM, MSN, MPH

Lyudmila Nepomnyashchii, Director, Community Health Acceleration Partnership

Katherine Holland, MPA/ID, Executive Director, Perkins International, Perkins School for the Blind

Stefano Bertozzi, MD, PhD

Ben Plumley, MA

Carolyn Reynolds, Pandemic Action Network, Co-Founder

Kate Lapham, MPA, PhD

Heather Pierce, MPH

Melissa West, Director Advocacy at VillageReach

Adeline Azrack-Muthee, MPH

Dr. Julia Schaletzky, Executive Director, Center for Emerging and Neglected Diseases, UC Berkeley

Julie Johnston

Daniel Robbins, MD, Executive Director, Kapnek Trust USA

Rainbow Rubin, PhD, MPH, Berkeley, CA

Tatiana Olenina

Kennedy Behrman

Ami Tango-Limketkia, M.Ed, Program Coordinator, Perkins International, Perkins School for the Blind

Kody Russell, Executive Director, Kitsap Strong

Shelene Stine, MD, MPH

Matt Weber