

In-Person School Experience Must Be Our Priority

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As one of many educators who proudly represent the diverse community of Merced County, I, like other school leaders, know that vaccination, masking, and other mitigation measures help keep schools open so students can thrive and learn.

The inclusion of a K-12 vaccination mandate into these mitigation measures could add to the layer of protection for our community; however, it concerns me that this mandate takes away from the choices of parents who are conflicted about a vaccination mandate. Without a personal belief option, we would be overlooking these parents and many students could be forced out of the classroom.

Not only is in-person instruction essential to the quality of a child's education, but many families rely on schools to keep their children safe while at work. Should this mandate pass without a personal belief exemption it could put parents in a difficult position.

Our collective learning recovery plans begin with the requirement of students being in school, under the guiding hand of a fully credentialed teacher. Without the in-person experience, many children will lose another year of growth toward achieving the educational goals our society sets for them and cause long-term negative effects on their ability to compete in the world market of both labor and ideas.

Learning recovery plans were developed for students to re-engage in classroom instruction and help them catch up. If a mandate with no personal belief option forces students out of the classroom, then we no longer have a learning recovery plan for all students.

Under California law, any new vaccine is required to have a personal belief exemption.

Many educators have been asked to interpret health guidance to our communities, but it is ultimately up to parents to seek advice and understanding from their health care provider or other medical professionals. While we educators have willingly stepped into the COVID breach during the past 20 months, we cannot be asked to create a barrier that could negatively impact the quality of a student's education or ignore the concerns of groups in our community. It is my hope that a health mandate provides our community with options and does not prevent students from attending school or receiving the most out of their education.