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CDPH Guidance Continues to Fall Short for Music Education

The California Music Educators Association (CMEA) is once again sorely disappointed in the guidance released on September 1, 2021, by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). In our efforts to work with the CDPH, we find them lacking in their ability to listen to us as professionals in the field of teaching music education in California. In June 2020, in a virtual face to face meeting, we asked them to separate in-school music teaching and learning from activities that take place after school, such as sports and clubs. We explained that music taught in the classroom to thousands of students daily is not “extracurricular.” When addressed in this manner, and in state guidelines by a state agency, they are reinforcing what we do as music educators and what our students do as music learners is not as important as math or science or other subjects taught in our schools.

The inability for the CDPH to differentiate in-class instruction from after school activity demonstrates a lack of knowledge and understanding of the California education code that states music is a required subject in schools. In addition, California has adopted music standards and a state adopted Framework to guide instruction. Their inability to do so disrespects all the work that music educators must do to provide music instruction in our schools, TK – 12, their efforts to follow the CDPH guidelines, and shows little respect for every student in our band and choir classes, that what they receive as part of their K-12 education in music is just an “extracurricular activity.”

It is difficult for CMEA to respect the agency that continually fails to support what music teachers and students are doing each and every day to have music education in our schools.

Research has shown that wind instruments can be played with appropriate bell covers with students wearing face coverings, and all singing can take place wearing a face covering. CMEA has provided this information since July 2020 based on the peer-reviewed, University of Colorado/University of Maryland Aerosol Study. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been designed specifically for wind players and singers, as well as covers for all wind instruments. The fact that the guidance still does not specifically acknowledge that indoor instruction can take place with these appropriate face coverings and instrument covers falls short once again, and is left to interpretation by local health departments, school administrators, and district/school legal councils. We believe the CDPH is more interested in activities such as sports and clubs than what is mandated as inclusive of an education for all students.

Finally, many schools do not have the capacity to maintain six feet of physical distance, and the science has shown that it is not necessary with the correct PPE and coverings for wind instruments and singers. Just as the guidance points out on page 4, item 2: Physical Distancing a. “Recent evidence indicates that in-person instruction can occur safely without minimum physical distancing requirements when other mitigation strategies (e.g., masking) are implemented. This is

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consistent with CDC K-12 School Guidance.” This is the same guidance when masking the wind player, the wind instrument, and the singer. We see a disparity between sports guidelines—which does NOT have physical distancing requirements, allows for full contact, and does not require students to be masked—compared with the guidance for music education. CMEA feels there is an inequity in the CDPH’s approach, which highlights a disparity between activities, is a safety hazard, and creates confusion for many.

We once again implore CDPH to clarify its guidance and that California Administrators and Legislators work to help CDPH make these clarifications. We call on Governor Gavin Newsom, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, State Board of Education President, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, California School Board Association President, Dr. Susan Heredia, Assembly member and Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, Patrick O’Donnell and Senator and Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Connie Leyva on behalf of music education and music students in CA schools to correct the language in the guidance dated September 1, 2021 to allow music students—singers and wind players—to sing and play wind instruments with appropriate coverings and face coverings and place music education where it correctly belongs, as part of the school day instruction for all of our students in California.

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