

## California Chapter 3

### Mailing Address

PO Box 22212  
San Diego, CA 92192-2212  
Voicemail: 619. 281.AAP3 (2273)  
Fax: 858.453.1311  
E-mail: [aapca3@aapca3.org](mailto:aapca3@aapca3.org)

### Physical Address

3160 Camino Del Rio South, Ste. 101  
San Diego, CA 92108

### Chapter President

Michelle Dern, MD, FAAP  
Scripps Coastal Medical Center  
Encinitas Pediatrics  
477 North El Camino Real,  
Suite B 105  
Encinitas, CA 92024  
[michelledern@san.rr.com](mailto:michelledern@san.rr.com)  
760.753.7143  
Fax: 760.753.2155

### Chapter Vice President

Nathan McFarland, MD, FAAP  
Neighborhood Healthcare  
10039 Vine Street  
San Diego, CA 92040  
[NathanM@nhcare.org](mailto:NathanM@nhcare.org)  
619.390.9975  
Fax: 619.390.8721

### Chapter Secretary

Liza Suh, MD, FAAP  
Kaiser Permanente  
6860 Avenida Encinas  
Carlsbad, CA 92011  
[Liza.m1.suh@kp.org](mailto:Liza.m1.suh@kp.org)  
760.931.4316  
Fax: 760.931.4300

### Chapter Treasurer

Christine L. Johnson, MD, FAAP  
CAPT (ret) MC USN  
Naval Medical Center San Diego  
Pediatrics  
34520 Bob Wilson Drive  
San Diego, CA 92134  
[Christine.l.johnson2.civ@mail.mil](mailto:Christine.l.johnson2.civ@mail.mil)  
858.336.5231  
Fax: 619.532.7721

### Immediate Past President

Marsha Spitzer, MD, FAAP  
Family Health Centers of San Diego  
Logan Heights  
1809 National Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92113  
[marshas@fhcsd.org](mailto:marshas@fhcsd.org)  
619.515.2300  
Fax: 619.233.2635

### Chapter Executive Director

Meredith Kennedy, MPH  
California Chapter 3  
Mailing Address  
PO Box 22212  
San Diego, CA 92192-2212  
Physical Address  
3160 Camino Del Rio South, Ste. 101  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619.281.AAP3 (2273) Voicemail  
Fax: 858.453.1311  
E-mail: [mkenedy@aapca3.org](mailto:mkenedy@aapca3.org)

### Chapter Website

[www.aapca3.org](http://www.aapca3.org)

### AAP Headquarters

345 Park Boulevard  
Itasca, IL 60143  
Phone: 800.433.9016  
Fax: 847.434.8000  
E-mail: [kidsdocs@aap.org](mailto:kidsdocs@aap.org)  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)



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## Recommendation for Urgent Reopening of Schools AAP-CA 3's COVID-19 & School Partnership Committee

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 3's COVID-19 & School Partnership Committee hereby reconfirms our recommendation for urgent, safe school reopening for all K-through-12 students.

As physicians caring for children, we operate at the nexus of public health and individual health. The safety of children, educators, and staff is our utmost concern, and its priority should be fundamental in planning school-reopening. Every day students are not in the classroom is detrimental to their physical and mental well-being. The leadership of the AAP-CA3, representing over 500 pediatricians in San Diego and Imperial Counties, strongly supports the urgent safe return of students to in-person education with the appropriate mitigation measures in place of mask wearing, hand washing, cohorting and physical distancing.

### EFFECTS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning itself is now causing harm to our children: we are witnessing an epidemic of depression and anxiety, with failing grades, victimization, and higher rates of physical inactivity and weight gain than their peers now in school. Kids need to return to classrooms with their teachers. Schools provide our children safety, nutrition, mental health support, and social and emotional skill-building. The services provided by schools are even more paramount for children with disabilities and other special needs. In addition, the loss of learning has been more apparent in schools that have remained closed compared to schools that have been open; this will lead to more inequity in education moving forward. Since there is ample data showing that opening schools does not endanger children, educators and school staff, nor raise a community's risk factors, the adverse consequences for children does not justify keeping schools closed.

### COVID-19 VACCINE

**Experts including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the UCSD school advisory group have stated that complete vaccination of all staff and teachers is not essential for safe return to in-person education.** We wholeheartedly agree that vaccination of teachers and staff will further decrease the likelihood of spread of COVID-19 in schools, and we support the recent inclusion of educators in COVID-19 vaccination distribution in San Diego. Fortunately, even one dose of the currently approved vaccinations prevents 80-90% of serious infections. Studies in North Carolina and Wisconsin showed very little classroom spread of the SARS-COV2 virus in schools prior to the COVID-19 vaccinations being available. This was accomplished with masking, hand washing, physical distancing, and quarantining those ill or in contact with others with COVID-19. Therefore, while vaccines are highly effective for individual protection, they are not a necessity for the safe return of teachers and children to the classroom.

### IN CONCLUSION

The vast majority of children and families in San Diego need schools to safely reopen now. Scientific evidence supports this as achievable. We recommend continued collaboration

between physicians, teachers, and families to facilitate an urgent, safe return to in-person learning, for those ready to return, with continued online learning for those families unable or not ready.

**Members of the AAP-CA3 COVID-19 & School Partnership Committee**

Abraham Broudy, MD, FAAP

Chanelle Calhoun, MD, MPH, FAAP

Patricia Cantrell, MD, FAAP

Michelle Dern, MD, FAAP

Erin Fortune, MD

Shakha Gillin, MD

Ricardo Indacochea, MD

Leah Kern, MD, MPH

Anna Mendenhall, MD

Dori Mortimer, MD, MPH

Veronica Naudin, MD, FAAP

Sabrina Perrino, MD

Sara Rourke, MMD, FAAP

Valerie Rubin, MD, FAAP

Crystal Doan Stephens, MD, FAAP

Gwendolyn Wright, MD