



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on November 21, 2020

## California Libs Turn on Newsom for Letting Poor Schools Remain Closed While Rich Reopen

Is the Golden State's governor on his way to a fall from grace?

In California, progressive groups are surprisingly turning against Democrat Governor Gavin Newsom for allowing the state's biggest school districts to remain shuttered, with [critics saying](#) it's unfair that minority students in poorer communities have to stay home while wealthier whites in private schools get to resume in-person learning.

The disparity between wealthier and lower-income schooling was highlighted in October, when Newsom announced that his own children had returned to private school in Sacramento while students in the neighborhood's public schools had to stay at home.



Gov. Gavin Newsom (AP Images)

Patrick O'Donnell (D), the chairman of the state Assembly Education Committee, said the current situation in California amounts to "state-sanctioned segregation."

"Some kids get to go and some don't. That's not what California stands for," he said. "I think we need to move faster but remain thoughtful."

*Politico* notes:

But teachers and some families assert that large city districts often have older classrooms with poor ventilation and too little space to socially distance. Many say they or their family members have health risks that make them vulnerable to exposure. And they say that districts and governments have not made testing accessible enough to ensure schools are safe.

They now point to a surge in Covid-19 cases this month, the pace of which Newsom said Monday was "simply without precedent in California's pandemic history." Newsom was alarmed enough to place 41 counties in the state's most restrictive tier, prohibiting indoor church services, dining and gym activities for 94 percent of residents.

"This isn't politics at all," California Federation of Teachers President Jeff Freitas said. "There's no gain from labor in this. Teachers have had their livelihoods threatened or are doing 10 times the amount of work, plus an extra level of stress on themselves. There's no win for us to say we should do remote learning."



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O'Donnell asserted, "We need strong guidance from the executive branch. We might be dead last to open, and our students might be dead last when it comes to academic success if we're not careful."

While the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) called on the state to shut down all schools as it did in the spring, Newsom has not required campuses to close if they already opened. He is also allowing private schools to stay open; most private campuses opened, thanks to a waiver process the governor offered when the school year began or when their counties had fewer COVID-19 cases.

Just as with school closures in the spring, California school reopenings have tended to take place along political lines, with more rural and conservative regions allowing students to return to class while bluer areas remain strictly distance-based.

"In places that are bluer, there's more deference given to the concerns of organized labor," said veteran education lobbyist Kevin Gordon, who represents school districts. "They're in a political environment that's more welcome to that viewpoint. That's one of the reasons why we've seen private schools open at a faster pace. They are much more immune to community pressure than a public school is, and they don't have to deal with a union. That doesn't make it good or bad, it's just the political reality."

Orange County Supervisor Don Wagner, who previously served as a Republican lawmaker, has criticized the state's take on school reopenings, accusing the government of "marching in lockstep" with teachers unions and of failing to set a threshold for when districts should start bringing students back.

"Life is not risk-free, and to suggest that, 'Oh, our kids will be fine, they won't fall behind,' we just need to get to, what, no coronavirus deaths?" Wagner said. "One of my frustrations with our governor is there is no end game. There's nothing where the governor or the school superintendent say, 'Let's get here and we can open up.'"

Clovis Unified School District in Fresno County is using an extremely localized form of control, permitting all elementary schools the green light to reopen but leaving the final say with each principal.

"We're face to face showing 'Hey, none of us have gotten sick, none of us have died,'" said Clovis Unified Trustee Steven Fogg. "We are in session every single time. We have not stopped being together."



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