



## California “Raided” Preschools for Not Enforcing Mask Mandate

Three San Diego preschools were “raided,” as angry parents put it, by state childcare agents after one parent complained that the preschools were not requiring children to wear masks — a policy about which the preschools had been completely forthright.

According to [Voice of San Diego](#), agents of the California Department of Social Services’ childcare licensing program entered the three locations of Aspen Leaf Preschools on the same mid-January day. “Regulators separated the children and toddlers from familiar adults at each of the centers to ask questions about the preschools’ masking policies,” wrote Will Huntsberry.



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“Child care licensing investigators do have the authority to interview children in isolated settings,” he reported, “but many Aspen Leaf parents said they believed such tactics were meant to be used in extreme cases, like alleged child abuse.”

Some of those parents complained to the agency.

“This gross abuse of power is shameful and unacceptable for many reasons,” Stephanie and Richard Rosado, parents of a four-year-old Aspen Leaf student, wrote in their complaint. “The people who ordered this to be done and those who participated should be held responsible.”

Aspen Leaf parent Connie Wu, whose daughter was not yet two at the time of the “raids,” told Huntsberry she doesn’t really know what happened during the interview because her daughter is too young to express it.

“She’s not developmentally able to tell me,” Wu said. “She doesn’t have the vocabulary to be able to talk about being interviewed by a stranger.”

Although Aspen Leaf briefly closed in the spring of 2020, when it reopened, it announced that it would not be enforcing the state’s mask mandate, which applies to both K-12 schools and preschools.

Unlike the politicians and bureaucrats in Sacramento, Aspen Leaf took a cautious-but-reasonable approach to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in its facilities. Its policy, [posted on its website](#), explains that the owners identified the risks present at their preschools, determined which ones they could mitigate, and intended to be “open and transparent about the remaining risks.”

When it comes to masks, Aspen Leaf owners decided not to require kids to wear them at all. After all, they were already going to be unmasked during naps and meals, which constituted up to three hours of the day. “In light of that, requiring masks for children at other times of the day is akin to attempting to dam a 10-foot wide river with an 8-foot wide dam,” they wrote. “Moreover, the practical difficulties of



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 9, 2022

keeping masks on preschool-age children would render such a policy ineffective and potentially counterproductive.” They also chose not to force teachers to wear masks in their own classrooms, partly because masking during prolonged periods of close contact with others is useless and partly because children’s “social and emotional development would be severely stunted if faces they routinely see are constantly masked.”

Although state officials were aware of this and had visited Aspen Leaf twice in December, they “didn’t issue any citations and didn’t write in their report that children weren’t wearing masks,” Aspen Leaf part-owner Howard Wu (no relation to Connie Wu) told Huntsberry. But after a parent — who had to have been fully aware of the preschools’ policy — complained to the childcare licensing authority in January, the “raids” occurred, and Aspen Leaf got “a Type A citation, the most severe violation type,” noted Huntsberry.

Howard Wu, who is also an attorney, said part of the reason Aspen Leaf never followed the state’s mask mandate is that the childcare licensing agency never issued one of its own and has no authority to enforce the one issued by the California Department of Public Health. “Had the state’s health department tried to enforce the mask mandate, Howard Wu said Aspen Leaf would have either complied or considered whether they had any recourse to fight it,” penned Huntsberry.

Naturally, the licensing agency disagrees. And just as naturally, when they investigated parents’ complaints, regulators “determined that the interviews were conducted in an appropriate manner and were a necessary component of the required complaint investigation,” an official told parents.

For now, Aspen Leaf is enforcing the mask mandate to avoid being shut down. Fortunately, the mandate is being [lifted on Friday](#), after which the preschools can return to their pre-raid, sensible approach.





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