High school students from Oakland, San Jose and across the state said Wednesday that working-class families and communities of color could be disproportionately impacted by school closures due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking at a video conference with reporters, Oakland High School senior Angel Palencia said, "It really upset me" when he heard health officers in Alameda County and other Bay Area counties issued a shelter-in-place order to try to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Palencia said enforcing the order "can increase the number of police in our community and black- and brown-colored people already are policed enough."

Palencia said the closures of libraries, recreation centers and other facilities are hard on low-income people of color because many of them rely on public services.

The discussion was presented by Californians for Justice, which describes itself as a statewide youth-powered organization fighting to improve the lives of communities of color and other marginalized communities.
Founded in 1996, the group works with students, parents and educators in Oakland, San Jose, Fresno and Long Beach. On Wednesday, the student activists released a list of demands asking for extended financial aid deadlines and postponement of testing schedules statewide, in addition to rent and payment relief programs and the suspension of raids by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Lastly, the group is asking Gov. Gavin Newsom to back a "Schools and Communities First" initiative to fund education on the November ballot.

Hanh Dang, a junior at Oakland High School, also spoke to the impacts of schools being shut down - possibly for the rest of the academic year. Dang said she's frustrated that her school will be closed for at least three weeks, and she can't see her friends. She's also concerned about people who make negative videos and comments about people of Asian descent because the coronavirus originated in China.

"I feel really bad about the racial assumptions. This isn't a virus targeting Asians only, it's impacting everybody," Dang stated. "It's not fair, and it's causing harm to the Asian Pacific-Islander community".

Selena Lu, a senior at Oakland High School, said the closure of her school makes her worry about her grades and about her readiness for college preparation tests. Deshae Lee, a senior at McLane High School in Fresno, is providing childcare for her mother, who is at work, and needs school resources to complete scholarship applications.

Julisa Reyes, a sophomore at a high school in East San Jose, said she's concerned about preparing for Advanced Placement exams scheduled for May that permit those who do well to take college-level courses while they're in high school and earn college credit and placement.

However, Reyes also sounded an optimistic note about staying resilient during the coronavirus pandemic, saying, "Youths will find a way to stay strong and express their beliefs."

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