



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

May 27, 2020

## **Superintendent's Message: Planning for Fall 2020**

Dear parents, students, and staff,

As we near the end of the 2019/20 school year, I want to express my empathy and understanding to all of you during this unprecedented time in our lives. I feel especially bad for our seniors who did not have the culminating experience of their last days of public education as other students have experienced in the past and will experience in the future. Perhaps going through this will distinguish them from all other graduates in some positive and yet to be determined way. Just consider the life lessons they have had to endure as I stated in a letter sent to all seniors last week.

To our parents and students, I appreciate all of your patience with our distance learning approach as our staff had to switch, adjust and put together plans in short order to continue your education. Although it was not ideal in many ways for everyone involved, it was important that we kept going and did not throw in the towel. We know there were positives and successes, but also some challenges. I will expand on how we will get better at distance learning should there be need to continue in the fall.

Every district and community is currently grappling with the question of: What will school look like in the fall? To date, the guidance we have received from the governor and Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) is that students can return to their respective campuses as a part of phase three of the governor's road to recovery plans. Within phase three, there are criteria schools would have to adhere to such as physical distancing and proper cleaning of facilities. You will be fully informed of the criteria as our plans evolve.

LACOE and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health have convened a task force of school superintendents and other stakeholders to develop a framework of possible procedures to open in keeping with the governors four-phase plan. A framework of these possibilities will be provided to us this week for school districts to use as guidance in developing their respective plans for opening. This letter does not describe a definitive plan, but provides an outline of where we may be headed and the process toward our goal of providing an exceptional education this fall.

I will start off by restating that school will open for students to start learning on August 20, 2020. This is the day we were scheduled to open prior to the stay at home orders were executed due to COVID-19.

What will this look like? There are three options the county and state has each district considering keeping in mind the questions of:

- How do we do so that is protective of the health and safety of students?
- How do we do so that makes teaching and learning successful for all students and can be adaptable and flexible as needed?



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- How do we do so realize that some of our parents need to get back to work and can not stay at home with their children?
- How do we do so realize some parents may not want their students to return in person, even if clearance from guiding agencies has been provided.

Options under consideration:

1. Distance learning continues. We would need to stress test this idea with the questions posed above.
2. Classroom experience: I believe we will have clearance on a version of in-classroom experience where physical distancing is required. This option is the most intriguing one I'm seeing being talked about by many superintendents I am collaborating with in our county and state. We would accomplish this through a hybrid approach between distance learning and in-classroom experience so that fewer students will be in a classroom at one time.

Variations being discussed under this hybrid approach are consideration of an alternating schedule throughout the week where a group of students stay home and a group are in school on any given school day.

Another variation of a hybrid model being discussed in the county is a version of a half day schedule where a group of students come in the morning and another group attend in the afternoon.

3. Full return to school once we are released as part of the state and county plan. We understand there may be families who do not want students to return to campus for a variety of personal reasons and we would create a program to address these concerns to support these families and continuity of education.

All three approaches have details to be worked out and all three approaches have different implications and challenges for elementary, middle, and high school grades levels. Dr. Jacqueline Mora, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, and her team are working with teachers and principals to identify issues with each model and developing solutions and protocols.

You have received an important parent and staff [survey](#) so we may learn from your experience this past two-and-a-half months and about aspirations and concerns you may have for the opening of school in the fall. I highly encourage all parents, guardians and staff to complete the survey. Statistics teach us the more people we have completing the survey, the more accurate we will be in understanding our community's needs. Our desire is to engage our parents and staff to the issues and challenges we need to address before a final recommendation of our plan for fall is presented to the school board for approval.

I realize many people are expecting more specific details to what school will look like when we open, but this is the most I can provide to you at this moment. I know that you may be anxious and that is understandable. The situation is fluid and the needs of each community are different in terms of child care and access to all necessary tools and environment to maximize a



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student's learning experience while keeping student and staff health at the forefront. More details will be shared as the information and refinement of our plans evolve.

Thank you for your patience, stay safe, and continue to look after one another as a community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent