



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

January 15, 2021

Superintendent's Message: COVID-19 and School Reopening Update

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff and Community Members,

Unfortunately, COVID-19 continues to rage through Los Angeles County, including our communities of Santa Monica and Malibu. The question of interest then is, when will our schools reopen and what is the district doing to prepare for reopening?

Currently, the Los Angeles Department of Public Health (LACDPH) strongly recommends that all schools in LA County close at least through January, as the cases now reflect gatherings and activities from the holidays and winter break.

In a survey conducted by the Los Angeles County Office of Education to all 80 Los Angeles school districts, 51 replied, with 32 stating they were observing this closure. Nine districts continue with minimal services for special education and English Learners, and many districts have chosen to close previously restarted programming for grades TK-2 under the waiver. LACDPH has told us they have all TK-2 waiver applications on hold, including those we submitted for all SMMUSD schools, until further notice.

Governor Newsom would like schools to reopen in some form as soon as it is safe to do so, and we share this interest. The criteria for opening is based on the adjusted daily case rate that must be below 28 cases per 100,000 residents. Newsom's "[Safe Schools for All](#)" proposed plan is going through legislative review currently.

State and LA County Health Department Orders and Recommendations

As of Jan. 12, LA County's adjusted daily case rate is 77 per 100,000 residents, very high above the criteria for reopening; the unadjusted rate is 127.3. The positivity rate is 20.5. Ten people in LA County are testing positive every minute. This data suggests that LA County schools will not be reopening for a while.

In early December, California announced the Regional Stay at Home Order, which implemented strict stay at home restrictions in regions where the ICU bed availability dropped below 15%. Right before winter break, Southern California's ICU bed availability was 0.5%. It is now 0% with no relief in sight.

The purpose of the LACDPH recommendation to close schools through January is to prevent further spread of the disease and not add to the overwhelmed medical system.

Developing the "Plus" in distance learning plus

All of the above contributes to the decision to select the distance learning plus model for our district's phased return. The disruptions that schools are facing from opening then closing and back and forth would impede the continuity of learning.

Principals and district office staff have been meeting and will continue to meet to establish "distance learning plus" schedules and logistics. Our goal is to have the details fleshed out by February with common agreements regarding the aspects of "Plus." The process to develop the plans will involve engaging staff and parents at the respective sites, followed by a district-level discussion that will involve teacher representatives, parent representatives, and principals. For those of you interested in keeping up-to-date with the progress of the development, please stay in touch with your site



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principal for more specific updates. My [letter](#) to you before winter break described potential plus activities for when LA County is in the red tier.

Vaccines

The Center for Disease Control has created a phase and tier system to determine who should receive the COVID-19 vaccine first. The first rounds started in December for healthcare workers, which includes our school nurses and health office specialists. All other education workers are next in an upcoming phase, which is scheduled to begin in early February (depending on vaccine availability). LACDPH aims to have a vaccine distribution road map for school district staff by Jan. 21. SMMUSD is working with our local City partners and health care groups to discuss distribution locally.

We are examining a priority order for our employees to receive the two-dose vaccination, once it becomes available. The prospect of having staff vaccinated by spring is a cause for celebration, as it brings us closer to more robust in-person opportunities in the spring and definitely in the fall.

COVID-19 live update dashboard

Our nursing team has now posted a dashboard reflective of isolation, positive tests and quarantine by staff, who have been on our campuses. You can monitor this page as it is updated daily: <https://www.smmusd.org/Page/6297>

This page is accessible through our district and school home pages in the What's Happening / News section in the coronavirus link: www.smmusd.org/Coronavirus

We want to let you know that while we are in this stage of closure in the more restrictive purple tier, our classrooms are ready for the return of students! Some classrooms are in use for special programs on campus with all required health and safety protocols in place.

We look forward to welcoming larger groups of students back to school. I truly miss visiting campuses and seeing the smiling faces of our students and staff. I also miss attending in-person meetings with our parents through PTA and other committees.

This is not an easy time for any of us. We know many children are suffering. Parents and staff are struggling. National unrest is adding to the unsettled and difficult time we are faced with right now. With the vaccines, we are seeing hope and the light at the end of the tunnel.

Please take time for self-care and supporting your friends and family who are severely challenged. Please know you are in our thoughts each and every day. We have our Family Resources link on every website home page. You will find resources regarding distance learning, parent webinars and community and mental health resources, that are frequently updated. www.smmusd.org/FamilyResources

Stay safe, be well and please continue to take care of yourself and each other.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent