



December 18, 2020

Superintendent's Message: Distance Learning Plus Approved for Reopening in Red Tier

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, Students and Community Members,

Our Board of Education voted unanimously to support the staff recommendation to open schools under the "distance learning plus" model, upon authorization by LA County to reopen within Tier 2 (red). Currently, we continue in the most restrictive Tier 1 (purple). The board approval followed a presentation, discussion and public comment at the Dec. 17, 2020, meeting.

Distance Learning Plus (DL+) is a continuation of how students have been receiving their instruction this fall, with a "Plus" being the addition of some in-person activities. Under the DL+ model, students would stay in the same classroom/classes with the same teacher(s), as is a high priority for families and teachers, based on our recent survey.

The DL+ model is the result of months of deliberation and discussions with staff, parents, and secondary students. Based on this input, DL+ is the model that best meets interests shared by parents, students and staff:

- Continuity of education without the disruption of changes in teacher/class that may include a return to distance learning if LA County falls back into the most restrictive tier
- Social-emotional connections on campus that may be expanded as the situation improves
- Best method to protect the health and safety of students and staff, a top survey priority for all groups
- Opportunity for continued improvement to the current DL model to ensure student engagement and strong student outcomes

This decision will now pave the way for district administration, in collaboration with school site administration and staff, to finalize the details of scheduling and identifying in-person activities for all students who are interested and willing to come onto campus for in-person activities.

Secondary schools - "Plus" activities might include:

- Support activities for students who are falling behind in an academic and/or social emotional aspect
- Athletics, art/music/drama
- Enrichment activities (i.e., clubs)
- In-person learning activities coordinated by departments and school site (i.e., grade-level or content-area activities and projects, flex activities)



Elementary Schools:

Core content workshops (math and literacy lessons) would remain synchronous in the mornings five days a week, with minimal adjustment to current distance learning schedules.

“Plus” activities for elementary might include:

To address the social emotional needs, asynchronous blocks after lunch would have a rotation of students on campus for some combination per site of:

- Social emotional learning
- Outdoor fitness activity
- Labs
- Hands-on project blocks
- Interventions
- Accelerated learning activities

At all levels, DL+ will be supervised by teachers and/or other school staff; designed and coordinated by SMMUSD staff; and implemented with all required safety protocols.

School board recommendations

The school board made the following recommendations regarding the implementation of DL+:

- Define and apply benchmarks to DL+
- School sites will have a say in how plus is applied at each school based on staff / family interests and needs
- Plus will be the foundation and may be expanded as health and safety conditions improve
- Plan for a full and safe return to schools in fall 2021 based on LA County guidelines, vaccine effectiveness, and community behaviors regarding stopping the spread of Covid-19.

On-campus learning activities with DL+

We realize that most everyone believes the best learning environment is to have all students back on campus, as was the case prior to this pandemic forcing the shut-down of in-person learning. We also recognize that this is a very sensitive and emotional topic with highly divergent views regarding the timing of returning to school. DL+ is the model I believe provides the most harmonious approach to educating our students once LA County moves into the red tier, with the implementation of all health and safety protocols. DL+ allows us the opportunity to manage the anxiety, fears, and safety concerns of all stakeholders until the end of the 2020-21 school year. This model also provides a great opportunity to be flexible and adaptable to any need to ramp up or slow down in-person activities, as we navigate this highly unpredictable pandemic environment. This affords our school administrators and teachers the ability to maintain a solid sense of continuity of academic instruction and support, while maintaining health and safety.



DL+ presentation and recent survey

[Board of Education presentation, Dec. 17, 2020](#)

[Results of Dec. 2020 survey](#)

Current in-person services

We do continue to expand in-person services for our special education and English learner students, and hope to increase the availability of in-person work hubs following winter break. We are working to support our families with their child supervision needs.

TK-2 waiver status

We have applied for TK-2 waivers through the county. When approved, our elementary schools and district will hold discussions with parents and teachers to determine the interest level and approach in considering reopening grades TK-2 while still in the purple tier.

Help stop the spread

We all need to continue to be diligent regarding reducing the spread of this virus. The state of California has issued a travel advisory recommending that all non-essential travel be cancelled, and that any travelers entering or returning to California self-quarantine for 14 days. If you must travel, follow the tips on the [CDC Travel webpage](#). This webpage also explains the risks from various different types of travel. As an extra step, there is a new app available that allows each of us to know if we may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. [More information](#).

We continue to update two web pages with important information:

www.smmusd.org/Coronavirus - contains COVID-19 information, district safety protocols, testing information and expectations for being on campus.

www.smmusd.org/School2020-21 - contains all past superintendent communications and information relative to this school year and reopening.

In other school board meeting business, the board elected new leadership for 2021. We congratulate Jon Kean as our school board president and Laurie Lieberman as vice president, both for second terms, and we welcome new school board member, Jennifer Smith.

More information will follow upon our return from winter break regarding our ongoing plans for improving distance learning and reopening in the red tier with in-person activities for our students in the DL+ model.

Best wishes for a restful, peaceful, safe and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,
Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent