



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

September 21, 2020

## Superintendent's Message: Reopening Update

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff and Community Members,

I provided an update regarding our reopening progress to the school board at the Sept. 17, 2020, meeting and want to share this update with our community.

We are continuing to work on our current distance learning program to ensure the ongoing robust delivery of education to all students. Simultaneously, we are also planning for the eventual reopening of our schools, which will look different than it did before the pandemic.

We have been pleased to hear from many parents that distance learning is far superior to what was experienced in the spring, thanks to our dedicated teachers, who have embraced this challenging situation and continue to provide engaging lessons and support to our students and families. We also recognize that distance learning is not working well for some families, and our teachers and administrators are doing what they can to address these concerns. Please watch for a district survey for you to complete so we may better evaluate your distance learning experience. Some sites have had surveys, and that is great. We would like to see your thoughts from a district perspective, so please take a few minutes for our survey, too.

I also shared at the board meeting that I am expecting to continue distance learning through the end of this semester; however, this announcement is not yet formal and approved by the school board. I believe it would be too difficult and disruptive to shift to another model while we have momentum and success at this time in distance learning. I will be recommending that we stay in distance learning through this semester, soon.

Regarding planning for reopening, we are currently addressing the required health protective measures for our schools, including staff training, purchase of personal protective equipment, plexiglass dividers, signage, portable sinks, furniture moving and some equipment to create outdoor learning spaces to comply with Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) protocols for the safe eventual return to in-person learning. We have formed a Covid Compliance Team responsible for the implementation of protocols at each school and district offices to provide continuous support when we do return. We will be sharing our plan at a school board meeting in the near future.

I remind our families and staff that we may not reopen for in-person instruction until the county approves. The state's four-tier, color-system outlines what may open and when. We are now in the purple tier, reflecting a still high number of cases, along with a high positivity rate. Some of our neighboring counties may start to return to in-person instruction; however, LACDPH is not allowing waivers for K-6 at this time in LA County, which includes Santa Monica and Malibu. More information regarding the tiered system is online: <https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/>

### SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

1651 Sixteenth Street • Santa Monica • California 90404-3891 • (310) 450-8338 • [www.smmusd.org](http://www.smmusd.org)

**Board of Education:** Oscar de la Torre • Craig Foster • Jon Kean • Maria Leon-Vazquez

Laurie Lieberman • Ralph Mechur • Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein

**Superintendent:** Dr. Ben Drati



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As part of my report to the board, we heard from three administrators regarding our In-School Work Hubs, Special Education and English Learner services.

Here are key points from each report:

**Dr. Susan Samarge-Powell, Director, Early Learning:**

- The district is working to establish several locations for students to participate in their school's distance learning program with supervision during the school day.
- The district has applied for a waiver with the state to provide in-school work hubs to provide support for families with high priority needs. There are multiple steps in the review process that may take up to five or six weeks.
- When the waivers are approved, we will begin at two locations, Franklin Elementary and Grant Elementary. To start, we will serve students of SMMUSD employees with one pod of 12 students at each location.
- We are working on setting up the classroom and outside areas as per guidelines, signage, PPE and other required materials to comply with LACDPH protocols.
- Once these locations are established, we will begin to add additional sites and expand to other high need families.
- The expansion of these hubs may include a cost to families who do not qualify for subsidies.
- Our thanks go to the Boys and Girls Club of Malibu, who is currently serving Malibu students, and we are in discussion with them to potentially expand support as necessary.

**Ms. Deanna Sinfield, Director, Special Education**

- LACDPH is now allowing for schools to hold in-person special education assessments on campus, under very strict guidelines to ensure the health and safety of students.
- We are preparing to begin assessments for special education by September 25 at three assessment hubs to serve all students: McKinley and the Obama Center in Santa Monica and Malibu Elementary in Malibu.
- Small cohorts of students will begin to return to campus in a phased approach, serving students with the greatest needs in the near future.
- Programs include: special education preschool, transition, social skills, intensive, life skills, and STEP-E and STEP-I programs.
- Cohorting rules and the requirement of having a maximum of 10% of students at school at one time create a complicated situation as we have more than 10% of students on each campus with Individualized Educational Plans.
- Special education parents may receive a survey to determine if they would like to continue distance learning or have interest in some in-person programming, as made available. We encourage parents to take this survey.

**Dr. Jacqueline Mora, Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services**

- Update on English learner services regarding the administration of the Initial and Summative English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) changing to remote testing.
- The California Department of Education is finalizing the revisions to the directions to begin testing.

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- Additional training will be provided to our ELPAC test administrators on the implementation of remote testing practices.
- We are developing a plan to bring back small cohorts of English Learners for in-person offerings based on recent provisions made by LACDPH.
- While this is in development, similar to the protocols mentioned above regarding special education, our more than 700 K-12 English learners are enrolled and receiving distance learning experiences across all of our schools and classrooms.
- Parents of English learners may receive a survey to determine if they would like to continue distance learning or have interest in some in-person programming, as made available. We encourage parents to take this survey.
- We continue to meet with our District English Learner Advisory Council (DELAC) for input and suggestions on curriculum delivery and support.

I understand that parents are anxious to know about the rest of the semester and distance learning. We will provide you with the final decision on that soon.

As stated above, while we are in distance learning, we continue to make great strides in preparing to return in person at some point. We will be seeking parent input as we weigh the delivery options between hybrid, virtual academy, distance learning and possible combinations. We will have to make decisions soon to best prepare for staffing and facility purposes.

Our school board and leadership team would like all of our students to be back in school. That is preferred, but unfortunately, that is not our current reality, and the future will look different than what we have experienced in the past. It is our goal to make our students' experiences and education as robust and meaningful as possible.

You may view the [video](#) of the school board meeting for my full report and the presentation of the Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan when posted in a few days.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership in your child's education.  
Stay healthy and continue to take care of each other.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent

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