



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

September 11, 2020

Superintendent's Message: Cancellation of survey sent out on Sept. 10th

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff,

A survey was circulated via email last night that asked questions about parent preferences for a potential return to in-person instruction, once approved by the local health authorities. The goal was to gather information about which instructional options would be preferred by parents once we are permitted to pursue options other than distance learning.

We apologize for causing concern and alarm among some parents/guardians. The survey was inadvertently worded in a way that did not accurately describe the options being considered for secondary schools once we enter the next phase of instruction for which we are trying to prepare. Therefore, we have decided to cancel this survey and work to create a new survey that better explains the options that will be available once we are permitted to return to in-person learning. We appreciate everyone who completed the survey and hope you will understand and take the next survey as your input is important to us.

Upon reflection, the survey did not accurately reflect the present situation and the high satisfaction level with our current distance learning model. We are extremely pleased with the hard work of our teachers in making distance learning a positive experience to start this school year. We recognize the incredible work of all of our staff along with the patience, flexibility, and commitment of our families, and the unstoppable grit and enthusiasm of our students.

However, as we try to anticipate next steps, we do want to know your thoughts since ultimately, we need to prepare for returning to in-person learning in some manner, once that is permitted. Please know that as we move forward, we will continue to reach out to parents, teachers, administrators and all staff as we consider the important decisions we will be making.

We will be sending out a new survey soon. The new survey will include a couple of questions about your student's experience with the first few weeks of school. It will also communicate the future options more clearly. We thank you in advance for your patience during this unprecedented time.

Reopening of school campuses

Although we do not yet have a planned return date, we have been working to prepare our campuses for in-person instructional offerings that align to the guidance provided by the LA County Department of Public Health (LACDPH).

At this point, LACDPH has authorized students with individualized education plans (IEPs) and English Learners requiring specialized in-school services or assessments to be allowed to return to campus in small groups. We are working to have safety protocols in place before taking this first step toward reopening in the coming weeks. LACDPH has released new

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guidelines that provide a return to additional in-person instruction for some school districts starting in November, however, that does not include SMMUSD.

While we have no way of predicting the rate of infection or total number of new cases for our community two months in the future, we do know that we must make contingency plans for all eventualities. It is understandable that the mention of a potential re-opening in November in the survey sparked worry among some families and staff. We want to reassure families that while we are preparing our campuses to be ready to open when we receive approval from the county, it is highly unlikely that any substantive changes will occur before the end of the first semester.

As new guidelines are released by LACDPH providing us greater flexibility, we will invite other groups to campus for in-person instruction when safe to do so.

Please remember, our decisions are being guided by science and data. If we open schools for in-person instruction, we will do so only when it is safe to return and when we can meet the county's protocols. We will communicate with teachers, classified staff, principals, management, and of course parents, prior to enacting a return to campuses.

Information for elementary school families

For elementary school families, when you receive the adjusted survey, we will be seeking to learn your preference between:

- 1.) Maintaining the status quo of distance learning as we have it today for everyone.
- 2.) Transitioning to a hybrid model:
 - Combine in-person and remote asynchronous instruction in smaller student cohorts as required by state and local safety measures; or
 - Distance learning (similar to the current experience)
 - Please note that elementary students not selecting the hybrid choice will have the option to continue distance learning, like the current program; however, your student might be assigned a different teacher. This may occur as we determine which teachers have an interest in returning to in-person instruction and which teachers, for health or personal reasons, cannot safely return to the classroom.

Information for secondary school families

For secondary school families, when you receive the adjusted survey, we will be seeking to learn your preference among:

1. Maintaining the status quo of distance learning as we have it today for everyone.
2. Hybrid model
 - Combining in-person and remote asynchronous learning delivered by SMMUSD teachers as allowable by state and local health authorities with all appropriate safety measures on campus.
 - Online learning through a Virtual Learning Academy featuring APEX.
 - The Virtual Learning Academy option for middle and high school students will be unlike the current distance learning model. Although we will do our best to match an instructor with the needs of students' subject needs, it will feature asynchronous learning, which is very independent in nature. Students will be assigned to a teacher; however, the teacher will not be conducting any live, or



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synchronous, instruction on the subject matter. We are working to provide some synchronous learning with SMMUSD teachers when possible. Learning will be through an online standards-based curriculum provided by APEX. The use of a platform, such as APEX, is necessary to provide what will inherently be a vast and differentiated subject specific needs of students in the secondary grade spans. APEX offers a robust curriculum and is highly regarded by educators and families.

If we do decide to move to a hybrid model, it is most likely that we will be unable to continue distance learning in the way we are currently providing it. This is because the staff who are currently assigned to teach distance learning are the same staff who will teach in-person within the hybrid model. It is not possible for secondary staff to teach both in-person and teach in our current distance learning model at the same time. There may be some areas where we can use SMMUSD teachers to provide distance learning in a format similar to the present configuration. Those areas of instruction might include general subjects such as English or some math classes. But, to put it more simply, in a hybrid model we do not have enough staff to maintain the distance learning model we are currently providing. No school district in our area has the staffing or funding levels to provide that sort of instructional model (hybrid and distance learning as currently structured). If we were to move to a hybrid model, we would need to work with an external curriculum delivery platform such as APEX to support the virtual learning experience. Please note that APEX is not new to us as a district. It is currently being used to support the independent study program at Malibu High and our district-wide independent study program. Incidentally, Beverly Hills USD, Culver City USD, and Burbank USD, among other districts, are using this platform as a part of their virtual learning experience.

Please be on the lookout for a video that addresses some key elements of our planning and our interest in input from our families and staff.

Thank you for your ongoing support of your student's learning during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent