



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

November 12, 2020

Superintendent's Message: Reopening Planning Next Steps and Upcoming Survey

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff and Community Members,

I want to provide an update regarding plans for reopening our schools. As of this moment, Los Angeles County is still in Tier 1 (purple), the most restrictive tier. Our county's positivity rate has gone up slightly, but our daily cases per 100,000 people have gone down from 8.0 to 7.6. A reminder that we need to be at 7 cases per 100,000 or below for two weeks before the county can move into Tier 2 (red). Once in Tier 2, we must be there for two weeks before the county will allow schools to reopen. The county health department officials were hoping that our county numbers would be much better heading into the holiday and winter season. They are concerned that our numbers are going to get worse as a result. We will keep you posted, but the optimism of us moving from Tier 1 to Tier 2 by January is now highly questionable.

We have previously shared our hybrid and distance learning models with you and announced that school site administrators would be holding staff and parent meetings to further explain and attain site-level input. Those meetings are wrapping up this week, and we are learning that there is a high degree of anxiety about coming back for in-person, on-campus instruction; divergent views on the hybrid approach and its potential impact on teaching and learning; and many other questions to still address.

As a result, we believe that before sending out a survey about the reopening models, it would be more prudent to convene a group composed of parent representatives, staff, and principals to address many of the divergent perspectives being brought up. The purpose of a virtual meeting is to allow teachers, principals, and parents to discuss what might be effective and why. Also, there are opportunities to discuss how they would solve the issues associated with each model and/or what additional resources would be needed. We are seeking additional input from these core stakeholders in order to make the best decision for all of our students. Some possible questions to frame the discussion include:

- Which is preferred: Seeing every student in-person each week, which means one cohort two days and the second cohort three days, then alternating? Or, are cohorts alternating five days in a week at a time preferred?
- After reviewing the descriptions of the traditional and technology-enhanced hybrid models, which model should the district implement? What makes one model preferred over the other?
- What questions and concerns are there regarding the "hybrid with enhanced technological device" model? If implemented, what is needed to make this option thrive?
- What approaches are desirable and viable for meeting the needs of those students who opt not to return to class within the hybrid model?
- How might teachers collaborate – team together – to reduce planning and create efficiencies in either model?

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

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

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- Could teachers team together to provide larger lectures or learning experiences, then all teachers conduct break-out rooms?

The ideas set forth above are intended to frame the discussion. We expect that discussions and ideas might differ between grade spans (elementary, middle, and high) or even within different grade levels within a school. We will have breakout sections during the meeting to address the varying needs and interests by grade span. The intent is to gather input from staff who will implement the adopted model and parents who need to support the proposed ideas, so that we are all working together to educate our students as best we can during these challenging times.

We will convene this group as soon as possible representing the different grade spans, sites, and constituents. As such, we have asked each school site to invite two parent leaders (PTA President and School Site Council member) and two teachers (Site Leadership Team member and Faculty Advisory Committee member). Additionally, the following representatives are being asked to join the district-wide conversation: SEIU steward, SMMCTA president, DELAC representative, SEDAC representative, and Principals.

The virtual meetings are to take place in the next two weeks. Following the meetings, a survey will be sent to staff, parents, and secondary students during the week of November 30. Staff will then make a recommendation regarding a reopening model for the school board to take action at the December 17 school board meeting. This is a change from the original plan for the board to take action on November 19. Based on where we are with the divergent views regarding reopening, we need this additional time to compile more information for us to make a confident recommendation to the board that would serve the majority of stakeholders in an effective way.

We appreciate the ongoing hard work by our teachers, staff, and administrators to make further progress for our families who want to come back to school, all the while maintaining a robust and effective distance learning program for our students. We continue to bring small cohorts of students for in-person services as outlined in this [letter](#) from our Educational Services Department. This letter also addresses the status of our TK-2 waiver applications.

As county and community illness rates increase, please keep in mind that the upcoming holiday season poses an additional threat of further spread. Please review the [LACDPH guidance for celebrating holidays](#) and celebrate safely!

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent

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