



## School Reopening Update

### 10-30-2020

I hope this message finds you and your family well. I'm writing today to provide an update on our school reopening planning and timeframe. Our goal since the beginning of school shutdowns last spring has been and remains to return students and staff to in-person instruction as soon as it is safe, practically feasible, and legally allowable to do so. We have been working diligently to design and implement plans that move us toward this goal and we've made significant progress. The information included here is intended to provide further clarity on our plans and timeframe.

**County and State Guidelines:** Our ability to resume in-person instruction is determined by both State and County guidelines. When Santa Clara County moved from the Purple to the Red Tier of the State's COVID monitoring system earlier this fall, schools within the County were legally able to resume in-person instruction as long as certain State and County guidelines could be met. These guidelines come from three different agencies - the California Department of Public Health, the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health, and Cal OSHA (state Division of Occupational Safety & Health). Combined, these three agencies provide a dizzying array of over 140 specific guidelines, some of which are mandatory and some of which are recommendations. If the guidelines provided by these agencies are not consistent in any area, we are obligated to adhere to the most restrictive guideline. The guidelines offered by these three agencies can be found via these links:

- [State Guidance](#)
- [County Guidance](#)

We've used this guidance to inform our reopening plans and to develop safety processes and protocols that we are implementing now as we've begun to return students and staff to in-person instruction.

**LGSUHSD's Four- Phased Plan:** Our district is approaching reopening as a gradual transition through a four-phased approach:

- Phase 1: Reopen on August 13, 2020 with all students in online/remote learning
- Phase 2: As conditions permit, brings targeted groups of students back in cohorts
- Phase 3: As conditions permit, bring all students back for in-person instruction in a part-time model which includes some in-person and some online instruction
- Phase 4: As conditions permit, bring all students back for full-time in-person instruction

### **Where Are We Now?:**

- Currently, we are in Phase 2 of our plan. We have multiple small stable cohorts of students (no more than 14 students in a cohort) engaged with in-person activities at each of our schools. Participation is currently voluntary on the part of both students and staff.
- We will continue to expand the number cohorts over the next six weeks as we continue to plan for a transition to Phase 3 that will involve all students returning for in-person instruction on a part-time basis.
- We view these cohorts as a way to pilot and refine our safety processes and protocols with a smaller number of staff and students before we bring nearly 3500 students and 300 staff members back to campuses at the same time - we believe that this is the best way to move toward that goal safely.
- We are also very actively engaged in conversations with and observation of other school districts around the state that, based upon local conditions, were able to reopen earlier than us so that we can learn from their experiences - both good and bad.

### **What's Next?**

We are actively refining our plan to bring all students and staff back for in-person instruction in Phase 3. Some key information related to this pending transition:

- The earliest we will make this transition will be at the beginning of the second semester, after Winter Break in January.
- We will make a decision by no later than the first week of December whether we will begin Phase 3 to open the second semester so students, families, and staff have enough time to prepare for such a transition.
- When we transition to Phase 3, families will have the choice to participate in the in-person blended hybrid model or to remain in online-only instruction as we recognize that not all families will be ready to send their students back to school for in-person instruction.
- By the end of next week, families will receive a survey in which they will be asked to indicate whether they would choose a part-time in-person model or choose to remain in online-only instruction when we transition to Phase 3. This is not a binding decision at this point and will be used to help with our planning.
- Of note, current County mandatory guidelines for high schools require that we maintain at least six feet of social distance among individuals as we return to in-person instruction. This means that we must run classes in the range of 12-13 students in each classroom and therefore precludes returning all students to school at the same time as normal classes average in the neighborhood of 28 students. This requires a part-time cohort approach which could range anywhere from 2-4 cohorts with students attending in-person instruction either one or two full days per week.

### **Why Wait Until January?**

- Ultimately, we believe that the safest and best approach is to reopen gradually rather than suddenly with all students and staff. We view the worst-case scenario as reopening too abruptly and in an unsafe manner resulting in a COVID outbreak at one or both of our schools

necessitating a sudden shift back to full online learning. This has not been an uncommon scenario at other K-12 schools and colleges around the country and one we wish to avoid.

- As mentioned earlier, we are currently bringing students and staff back in smaller numbers as a way to test and refine our safety protocols and we've already learned a great deal and made changes to our practices based upon this experience. We anticipate we will learn even more as the number of students and staff on campuses slowly increases.
- It's also important to understand that reopening a high school safely is much more complicated than reopening elementary and middle schools because it is far easier to safely open schools with smaller overall student populations and to reopen schools in which it is possible to keep students in stable cohorts, as in elementary where students stay in one classroom with the same group of kids for the duration of each school day. This is impossible to do at the high school level where students have to change classes multiple times each day thereby exposing them to hundreds of other students each day. This also applies to staff who will be exposed to hundreds of students each day.
- Finally, we believe that the best time to make a transition that will significantly change the instructional model (i.e., full online to blended) is in alignment with the beginning of a new grading period as any transition of this sort will be disruptive for both students and staff and we want to minimize the impact of any disruption on student learning and grades.

**Academic and Social-Emotional Support:** We fully recognize that some of our students find distance learning challenging academically and/or due to social-emotional concerns and we have developed a number of supports for these students. We have opportunities for tutoring and targeted academic support both in-person and online and we have additional social-emotional supports in place as well. If you feel that your student is struggling in any way, please reach out to his/her Guidance Counselor immediately so we can work together to support your student.

**Conclusion:** I believe that we all share a common goal - to get our students and staff back to in-person instruction in a safe manner. Even with comprehensive safety protocols, each expansion of in-person instruction increases the risk of COVID spread among our students and staff - and therefore their families and our community. There are clear benefits to a return to in-person instruction that must be weighed against the risks involved in doing so. When we feel that we can sufficiently mitigate the risks to the point that the rewards outweigh the risks, we will have our students back on campus, even if it's on a part-time basis. This is our primary goal, it is the balance that we are trying to maintain, and it's what we are working on every single day. There is no proven playbook for this situation and no matter the timeline we elect to employ for our reopening, some members of our school community will be unhappy - some want us to move more quickly and some want us to move more slowly. We are listening to all perspectives, but ultimately we seek to make decisions that we believe best support the learning of our students while also protecting the health and safety of our students, families, and staff.

Thank you for your support of our students and our schools. Our teachers, our support staff, our administration, and our Board of Trustees all want to get back to in-person instruction as soon as we

can, but want to ensure that we do so in a manner that is safe for all involved. I look forward to seeing you back on campus soon.

Sincerely,

*Mike Grove*

Michael Grove, Ed.D.  
Superintendent