



SIERRA SANDS Unified School District

District Communication 12.4.20

December 4, 2020

Dear Sierra Sands Families and Community:

This update comes at a time when pandemic infection rates are on the rise and impacting everyone across the state and nation. Gov. Gavin Newsom conducted a press conference Thursday afternoon outlining additional stay-at-home orders as we are to anticipate a “surge on top of a surge” in COVID-19 outbreaks. While that does not appear to disrupt our phased plans to return students to campus, we should all be cognizant of the fact that Kern County has among the highest COVID-19 positivity rates in California.

One of the greatest societal challenges we are facing is the closure of most of the nation’s schools. Schools and learning are essential. Many of us are concerned and frustrated about the limitations of Distance Learning (DL) despite all the hard work and dedication invested by our teachers and support staff.

While we are working very hard in Sierra Sands to assure the best DL program possible, we also know that even a “perfect” DL program would simply not be good enough for everyone. All of us in Sierra Sands want our schools open as quickly as is safely possible, and for them to remain open.

Two weeks ago we opened several cohort classrooms at Gateway Elementary, Richmond Elementary, and Burroughs High School. Between December 7-14, we are opening additional cohort classrooms at three more campuses: Faller Elementary, Monroe Middle, and Murray Middle. In January, we plan to open cohorts classrooms for struggling seniors at Burroughs High School and Mesquite High School to be sure those who are most at risk can receive additional, targeted support. The rationale behind opening up limited and prioritized cohort classrooms is that there are very special needs that demand special attention.

You have probably heard about districts all across the state who have announced that either they will not open at all this school year, or not until an estimated date in future months. We have been reluctant to declare a date because our goal is to connect students to an on campus learning opportunity as soon as is safely possible. Every day counts, and any days we can learn on campus this year will matter. We are not willing to give up on returning to school because a lot can happen in the coming weeks/months with public health and vaccine implementation. The sooner we can open our schools, the sooner we can better serve your student(s) and your family.

Speaking of opening up as soon as is safely possible, our Kern County Superintendent of Schools sent to all districts a 45-second video that speaks to a “Save our Schools” movement. I have included the YouTube link below so you can view it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVY3EqysaVc&feature=youtu.be>

I want to acknowledge that you and your family are working through a very difficult time. I know that many of you are frustrated, and some at your wit’s end, with all the disruption to everyday life and especially with certain limitations to the way your child is learning right now. I hear about the many challenges as it relates to students not being as engaged in a zoom classroom as they would be in the physical classroom. This is a complex and multi-layered challenge but one of the major impacts on you - the parent or guardian - is that the personal connection and human engagement is not at the level it needs to be. The truth is that things are really hard. Out of this difficulty we will emerge stronger and more informed, but it is OK in the meantime to acknowledge that “it ain’t easy.”

I will continue to reach out to you and provide updates. In the meantime, be well and do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can help in any way.

Sincerely,
Dave Ostash
Superintendent