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Recommendation from Public Health Officer and Superintendent of Schools

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Public Health Officer and Superintendent of Schools Recommend San Joaquin County Schools Start New School Year With 100% Distance Learning

Due to the rise in confirmed cases of COVID-19 and increased hospitalizations in San Joaquin County, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Maggie Park and San Joaquin County Superintendent of Schools James Mousalimas strongly recommend that local schools begin the new school year providing only distance learning instruction through at least the end of August, 2020.

Dr. Park and Superintendent Mousalimas released the following joint statement:

Back in March, school districts in San Joaquin County joined those across the state making the difficult decision to close campuses to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19.

At first, the efforts to "flatten the curve" showed promising results. But today the numbers show a surge in confirmed COVID-19 cases that has created a situation that is worse than it was on March 13, when San Joaquin County schools were recommended to close. Currently the number of positive COVID-19 cases in San Joaquin County has risen to 6,988, and the ICUs in our seven area hospitals are at 121% capacity. Children younger than 18 years old account for 642 of the positive case count.

Understanding the virus and its local community spread is essential when deciding when and how to reopen schools for the school year. It is for that reason that we are strongly recommending that schools and districts begin the 2020-2021 school year on a 100% distance learning model at least through the end of August. We will review this recommendation in mid-August to determine if the situation has improved enough for schools to begin to offer a modified form of in-person instruction in September. Until then, districts and schools should focus their resources, training, and expertise in providing the best-quality distance learning education possible for all students.

This week, we will also work together to amend the San Joaquin County guidance document for schools: "2020-2021 School Year Planning: A Guide to Address the Challenges of COVID-19."

Education is an essential service in our community, and it remains our firm belief that our children are best served by a return to as much in-person instruction as possible. Beyond the increased educational opportunities that come with being physically in a classroom, children also learn social-emotional skills and receive other supports and benefits from being at school. However, any return to in-person instruction must be guided by the evolving scientific understanding of COVID-19 and the facts of its spread in San Joaquin County. This is why it is important that our school leaders and health experts continue to work together to protect the health and safety of students, staff, and all our communities.