

February 18, 2021

Dear Families,

I know this is your President's Week off, and I hope you're having a good break. Normally I wouldn't communicate with families during a vacation period. However our negotiations and preparations for reopening schools are moving quickly, and I want to be sure you are all up to date.

We have summarized our current status via a bulleted list of key points for those of you in a hurry. For those seeking more information, we have also included expanded detail on those topics on our website.

This is the 30th official COVID-19 update that we have sent to families in the last year, and I hope that the frequency of our updates helps you understand how committed we are to providing all our families with accurate, up-to-date information in a timely and transparent manner.

Key Points and Information

- Case rates in Alameda County are 12.6/100,000. (Under current guidance schools can reopen when case rates are below 25/100,000.)
- We do not yet have an agreement with our teachers union that would pave the way for our reopening on March 8, but both sides are working hard on these negotiations.
- We have launched COVID-19 testing programs for both students and employees. Both groups will have to be tested for COVID-19 either weekly or bi-weekly in the initial stages of a return to campus
- Although public health agencies have announced that teachers do not need to be vaccinated before schools can re-open safely, we have been doing everything we can to make sure all of our employees know about current and upcoming vaccination opportunities.
- Substitute teachers will not be utilized in the initial stages of our in-person return. This could result in some in-person sessions being conducted online with short notice until the later stages of reopening.

Topic Summaries

Negotiations on Small group Supports and Services

As of this week, we are slowly but surely making progress on our negotiations with our labor partners.

AUSD and CSEA-27 signed a Tentative Agreement on general reopening last September. CSEA-27 ratified an agreement on special education learning hubs last week. The Board of Education will vote on that that agreement on February 23.

AUSD and the Alameda Education Association (AEA) continue to negotiate about reopening schools (see below). The two bargaining teams signed a Tentative Agreement

(TA) on small group instruction on February 8. (Our [February 11 press release](#) has details.) The Board voted 5-0 to approve that agreement on February 17. AEA members will vote on that TA through February 19.

Which Students Will be in Small Groups?

If the AEA votes to approve the small group instruction MOU, the small groups will consist of three to 14 students and up to two adults. The groups are designed to provide academic, social emotional support and access assistance to the district's most vulnerable students, including: students with disabilities, homeless and foster youth; students from low-income families; students experiencing mental health and wellness issues; students unable to access distance learning; and English Learners in grades TK through 12.

School principals will work with teachers and intervention leads to identify students who most need the support provided by small group instruction while we continue to work towards our broader first phase of reopening.

Negotiations and Vaccines

As you may know, the primary sticking point in our negotiations with our teachers union at the moment is vaccinations for teachers. To be very clear: we fully support the vaccination of educators along with other critical essential workers. AUSD staff has spent considerable time over the last week helping to facilitate the scheduling of vaccination appointments for our employees, and we will continue to research and communicate about these opportunities in the coming weeks. (Employee vaccination information is available on our [Staff Vaccination web page](#).)

However, we also firmly believe that our investments in safety measures over the last eight months comply with current public health directives. And those directives do not require full vaccination of staff prior to reopening elementary schools for an opening round of

limited in-person instruction. This is the primary challenge standing between us and our goal of reopening on March 8.

COVID-19 Testing for Students and Staff

The district will be providing testing again this week for both employees and students.

Employee testing this week occurred on February 17 and 18 at Alameda High School. Employees can get tested next week on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday (February 22 - February 24), also at Alameda High School.

Schedules, appointments, and parking directions for employee testing are available at: www.alamedaunified.org/employeectest.

Student testing began February 12.

Phase 1 of the student testing program, which will extend until February 21, is a *pilot* program. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage our families to get their children tested during this time, because:

- It is a good way to introduce children to the testing process before it becomes mandatory.
- It gives National Labs an opportunity to get student data into their system, which means the process will go more smoothly once testing becomes mandatory.
- Testing students will help us to identify asymptomatic positive cases, which can help reduce viral transmission throughout our community.
- It gives the District an opportunity to identify and solve potential glitches in our testing process before the full rollout.

We have heard some parents voice concerns about having their children tested. We were gratified to see last weekend that National Labs, which is providing this testing for us, had created a family-friendly environment for children, one that included children's music, stickers, and helpful medical staff. In addition, we want to be sure you understand that the COVID-19 test we are using is a low nasal swab that does not hurt at all. It is also a highly reliable test that turns results around in roughly 48 hours.

AUSD is expanding this pilot elementary student testing this weekend (February 19-21) by opening test sites at Wood Middle School and Alameda High School, in addition to Ruby Bridges Elementary School. You can find the testing location for your elementary school, along with appointments and schedules, at www.alamedaunified.org/studentcvttesting.

Phase 2 of our student testing begins February 25. ***As of that date, student testing will become mandatory in preparation for our March 8 target re-opening date.***

That testing will be:

- Weekly or twice monthly - depending on county case rate
- Provided at multiple test sites
- Mandatory for all TK-5 students planning to attend the in-person segments of our initial hybrid schedule return

Under the recommended testing cadences issued by the California Department of Public Health on January 14, 2021, once the county case rate drops below 4 cases/100,000 residents (Orange Tier), districts will no longer need to test students for COVID-19 unless a student has symptoms.

TK-5 Initial In-Person Schedules

We have heard constructive critiques about the limitations and challenges of our initial TK-5 reopening schedules. Please note that this initial reopening is designed to reintroduce students and staff to in-person learning and also test and improve our new safety practices and protocols. As public health conditions improve, we hope to explore options to expand the schedule.

We recognize the challenge that the current schedule presents and will continue to explore options to extend the day this spring. Note that even with reopening now possible, state and local public health guidance still creates constraints that *do not permit us to have all students on campus at once or in mixed cohorts.*

Substitutes and Sub Days in General

One of the more challenging aspects of reopening schools while public health directives still require cohort stability is the question of how to manage days when substitutes are needed. Like students, teachers will be directed to stay home if they are ill or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms in these initial stages. Therefore, our usual solutions -- substitute teachers, combining classes, or distributing classes to other teachers -- will not be available until later stages of our reopening. That means that in some cases a class may need to revert quickly to being online until the teacher is well enough to return.

Fall Planning

I know that many of you have questions about our fall schedule and protocols. As you can imagine, we don't yet know what either the public health conditions or the public health mandates will be as of August. Because of that, we are currently considering three options:

- Plan A: Full return with full cohorts of students in a 5 days per week schedule (a scenario that may see relaxed distancing requirements and cohort size but maintain public health mandates such as face coverings)
- Plan B: If reduced cohort sizes and distancing requirements remain in place, we will propose a split cohort schedule that maximizes on-campus, in-person time for students (these options will be shared in increasing detail with the community in March)
- Remote School Plans: We are certainly channeling some of the lessons we have learned over the past several months into revised concepts for remote learning. Whether or not we will continue to offer an exclusively remote option in August of 2021 will be determined as the spring progresses and as public health directives evolve.

All schedules, of course, would meet county and state mandates on a safe return to school.

We expect to have more updates as we get closer and closer to our re-opening date. Please note that we are currently preparing handbooks for both families and staff to be distributed shortly to help you understand what to expect when our schools can once again welcome students and staff back in person.

Respectfully,

Pasquale Scuderi