

March 21, 2020

Dear AUSD Families,

In the course of the last week, our community has weathered two dramatic changes: AUSD's in-class instruction has been suspended, and first Alameda County and then the entire state of California was put under a shelter in place order.

I am writing today to help you understand our approach to this situation, what we have done so far, and four important points about this response. **This is a fairly long letter, and I appreciate all of you who are able to read to the end. For those of you who prefer an abbreviated message, our basic messages are as follows:**

- I know how exhausting it is to balance your family's needs with your own responsibilities.
- AUSD staff is working very hard to find ways to support students, families, and the community at large in this unprecedented time
- We are taking the time we need to develop educational platforms that will serve educators, students, and families alike, including our students who receive special education services.
- Next week (March 23-27), we will be distributing computer devices to students who need them and allowing students back on campus to pick up materials they need. Your principals will communicate the schedule of that to you.
- The following week (March 30-April 3) is Spring Break. Teachers and students should take that week off as previously planned
- Social distancing remains crucial for controlling the spread of COVID-19. Please see the attached letter from our Student Services team for more details.
- We have convened a special working group to focus on the needs and concerns of our seniors, the Class of 2020. We know this situation is especially challenging for them - academically, socially, and emotionally.
- Starting on Tuesday, March 24, AUSD will be serving meals **two times per week** - Tuesdays and Fridays - at Earhart Elementary School, Wood Middle School, and Alameda Point Collaborative. The hours are 11 am to 1 pm.

As a parent of young kids myself, I empathize with how troubling and exhausting the past week was for AUSD families and our staff. The balancing acts we have all, families and staff alike, had to perform on short notice between our personal lives and our work responsibilities have overloaded many in our community and many across the globe.

For the time being, amidst this uncertainty and amidst the increases in social and communal restrictions in place to manage our community health, our staff are continuously refining our efforts to best serve Alameda families.

While our efforts may at times be imperfect, the commitment I have seen from so many on our district-wide team, in just the first five days of this new reality, leaves me confident that we can marshal a collective effort that will support student learning even in the unprecedented and unpredictable days ahead. So many of our people, classified staff as well as certificated educators and leaders, are putting in long days and nights and demonstrating a willingness to go above and beyond for our students and families.

Remaining in thoughtful and focused partnership with you, our families and school communities, will be critical to us all being successful on behalf of kids. The patience and space so many of our AUSD families have afforded us to address this dramatic shift in structure and direction on such a short timeline has been invaluable and is deeply appreciated. We are not taking this for granted.

Our aim as educators in this situation is to avoid rushing to the most immediately available solutions, or to reflexively hurry into modalities or options that may not be accessible to all, or even sustainable for *anyone* over time. A slower-paced week of suggested activities and ensuring our students have the basic tools they need should generally define next week. Then spring break follows and together these two weeks give us all some additional time as a community and a school district to set our bearings a bit more, and implement a working model for distance that might have greater value and effectiveness for students over a longer period of time.

Please see the following pages for five items of particular importance this Saturday.

Respectfully,

Pasquale Scuderi  
Superintendent  
Alameda Unified School District

**Five things to share this Saturday:**

**1. Our food service is changing to two (2) times per week**

Starting Tuesday March 24, we will be serving meals two days per week - Tuesdays and Fridays - from Earhart Elementary School, Wood Middle School, and the Alameda Point Collaborative. The hours will be 11 am to 1 pm, and families will be provided with several days' worth of food at a time. Early this week we will also be sharing a comprehensive calendar that includes *all* places on the island where families can get free food during this time.

**2. We are working on finalizing a general plan and guidance for remote instruction and distance learning**

This week, our Teaching and Learning staff, under the direction of Chief Academic Officer Sara Stone, has been working with our principals to develop our plan and general guidance for remote learning. Our priorities this week have been making sure that all students have the tools they need to access online learning opportunities.

Next week we will be making sure all of our teachers are comfortable in the online environment and with the platforms we are choosing to use across the district.

We expect to be in a place of broad implementation of our comprehensive distance learning plan underway for all students by April 6, and more details on what you can expect will be available after towards the end of next week. Please remember that in the meantime we have activities for all grades - and in multiple languages - on the [AUSD Online Learning Portal](#).

We have received a range of perspectives from parents and families, some eager to have full continuity of learning as soon as possible and others asking for a clear pause for kids and families who are adjusting to new schedules, dealing with competing needs for devices within the same household, or simply needing to breathe, process, and adjust to this public health situation.

We are trying to find a universally beneficial balance so please note that until we get further off the ground, we will insist on maximum flexibility for kids and families. Decisions on schedules, expectations, and grading adjustments are not yet final and will be student-centered. Please know that in light of this massive change *we will lean into adjustments that do not penalize kids for this disruption*. We are also meeting with principals twice daily via video conference to ensure consistency across our schools.

Our general goals for the next three weeks at a glance:

**3/23-3/27**

- Distribution of devices to students
- Continue suggested activities from our online portal
- Students allowed to retrieve materials and textbooks from schools (*guidance on access to campuses is specific to individual schools and schedules and safety guidelines will come from your principal*)

**3/30-4/3**

- Spring Break: Schools closed including online or distance learning

**4/6-4/10**

- Broader implementation of K-12 Distance Learning Plan. (Current indications are that we will not be back on campuses that week. We will have an official announcement about extending the suspension of in-class instruction early next week.)

**3. We are thinking of our senior class**

We want to acknowledge the particular impact that this public health situation is having on our 12th grade students and families. It is not lost on us that this is a milestone year for them, and that this disruption to their academic year and their final quarter celebrations are causing uncertainty and very understandable anxiety.

Because of this, we have convened a working group of key staff members to discuss all of the very specific challenges facing our senior class in this environment, both academic and social, and to generate ideas for how we might create alternatives or options within these very trying circumstances. This group will be consulting external partners from the university systems, public health departments, students themselves, and parent groups.

This working group will be facilitated by our Chief Student Support Officer, Kirsten Zazo, a former high school principal herself, and also include administrators from all of our high schools, college advisors, and other key staff. This working group will make recommendations to district leadership in the next few weeks on ways that we might better support our graduating Class of 2020 in light of the specific impact this turn of events is having on them.

#### **4. Being Thoughtful About Our Students with Learning Differences**

One of the many reasons we want to be very deliberate with rolling out broader models for distance learning is ensuring that what we offer students and families during this time also considers the needs and challenges of students with learning differences or particular disabilities. Our special education leadership team and staff have spent this week focusing on getting resources to students and providing initial training to teachers on online platforms while also drafting possible collaboration schedules between special education and general education teachers. Next week our focus will shift to developing solutions with our specialists on ways to best provide specific services and support to students through distance learning channels.

#### **5. Social Distancing is Crucial**

All of us here at AUSD understand how challenging it is to keep children isolated from other children. In difficult times, our instinct is to gather together to care for one another. But our behavior in this state of emergency has to embody exactly the opposite. Minimizing social contact is crucial to the health of your family and all of our families. Please see the attached letter from our Student Services Team for more specific information on the need for social distancing. And please also keep an eye out on social media for the [Public Service Announcement](#) that Mayor Ashcraft and I made Friday. That PSA contains our personal plea to community members to keep themselves and others safe.