



SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**SMMUSD School Board Approves Distance Learning
to Start the 2020-21 School Year**

Continuation of board discussion scheduled for July 21st

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education approved distance learning to begin the 2020-21 school year. This model was selected as the most health-protective model for students and staff to begin the new year, scheduled for August 20, 2020.

The unanimous vote followed a robust discussion, review of data, parent survey results, and public comments, at the regular July 16, 2020, school board meeting. The school board plans to continue the discussion on Tuesday, July 21, 2020, at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. No additional public comments will be taken during the continuation of the July 16 meeting. The agenda and Zoom login instructions are [online](#).

The district had been leaning towards starting the year with a hybrid approach, (a combination of on campus and distance learning); however, the recent surge in Covid-19 cases in LA County has delayed the return to school buildings until it is safe to do so. The goal is to return to on-campus learning when all [protocols](#) established by the LA County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) are met, and when newly announced state requirements are met..

Governor Gavin Newsom announced on July 17, the day after the board's unanimous decision, that all public and private schools in California counties on the state's monitoring list for rising coronavirus infections would be required to provide education through distance learning. Los Angeles County, along with other counties on the monitoring list, must be off the list for 14 consecutive days and meet the county health protocols before returning to in-person learning. With this directive, all school districts in Los Angeles County will now begin the school year with distance learning.

"We are committed to providing our students with a rigorous and engaging distance learning program for the fall," Superintendent Dr. Ben Drati said. "We heard loud and clear that distance learning in the spring had some bright spots, but also presented challenges. We have been working with CTA, teacher leaders, site leadership, and consulting with parent groups, to develop the framework for a more robust distance learning program, knowing that we may have to transition back if conditions worsen. We did not expect it to begin with this model immediately, but we will be prepared to do so."

The framework will include professional development for our educators before school starts, attendance expectations, grading, deployment of textbooks and devices, connectivity assistance, plans for continued meal service, family resources and supporting student learning at home. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans or are English learners, homeless, or in foster care, will receive information from their school sites regarding plans and expectations.

Communication with parents and students regarding expectations of teaching and learning will be coordinated with the district and delivered by school principals and site staff. Superintendent Drati stated that he expects principals to be engaged with their families about these matters prior to the start of school and for teachers to engage students and parents regarding expectations of their class or classes during the first two weeks of school.

School administration will engage families on a regular basis regarding how distance learning is advancing. District leadership will also provide opportunities for feedback and encourage parents to stay engaged with the mechanism used to evaluate the work. Details about these evaluative tools will be provided soon.

Additional information in the coming weeks will also include possible child care and/or student supervision offerings, the status of extracurricular activities, distance learning platforms and digital privacy, internet etiquette and guidelines (Netiquette).

The district is concurrently preparing for on-campus learning, as per our guiding agency protocols, including LACDPH and Los Angeles County Office of Education. Creative ideas including use of outdoor spaces and other indoor campus spaces for in-person learning are all being discussed.

“We will be nimble and creative as we prepare to return to our campuses and be ready to do so in a health-protective and safe manner,” Dr. Drati said. “Until that time, we are working through the summer to create a high-quality distance learning program for all students, including those who are the most vulnerable.”

The California Department of Education announced that all districts must develop a Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan requiring that districts explain how they will implement distance learning. SMMUSD will present its report at two public hearings and will adopt it by the required September 30 date.

“Our goal is to return to campus learning as quickly as it is safe to do so,” Dr. Drati said. “We will follow the directives from the state and county to determine this date. Until then we are confident that our teachers will provide rigorous and robust distance learning education to all students.”

Gov. Newsom encouraged everyone to wear masks, physically distance, wash your hands frequently and minimize mixing, during his public address on July 17th. More state info: www.Covid-19.ca.gov

SMMUSD school reopening information: www.smmusd.org/School2020-21

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