



Tuesday, October 27, 2020

**San Diego Unified Safety Measures are Working in First Phase of Reopening;
January Goal for Start of Next Phase, Subject to Virus Control, Online Option to Remain All
Year**

SAN DIEGO -- Speaking at Gage Elementary School today, San Diego Unified leaders said safety measures put in place over the summer have so far prevented any documented cases of COVID-19 transmission on its campuses that have reopened. The next phases would continue to be rolled out gradually, with secondary and pre-K students next to receive appointments for in-person education following further collaboration with educators and other employees.

District leaders said they hope to begin bringing large numbers of students on campus in January for in-person learning, although they expressed concern over the worsening COVID-19 conditions in San Diego County.

“Safety has been our strategy from the start,” Superintendent Cindy Marten said. While stressing the fact the first phase of reopening has only just begun, she said preliminary signs are encouraging. “The safety precautions put in place at schools like Gage and elsewhere appear to be working. So far, we have had zero documented outbreaks of COVID-19 and zero documented cases of transmission on campus, as determined by the County Office of Public Health. Exactly two weeks into Phase 1, we are encouraged.”

San Diego Unified began its phased reopening Oct. 13. Since that time, there have been 4,000 appointments for in-person learning across 106 schools within California’s second largest school district. Marten said schools will continue increasing the number of appointments in the weeks ahead, with the goal of soon providing time slots for secondary and pre-K students. She praised school leaders and educators for working together to keep the reopening safe and promised future growth in the program would be created collaboratively and at the bargaining table.

San Diego Unified has spent more than \$45 million to reopen, including more than \$11 million on PPE alone. Among the safety precautions put in place at Gage and other schools are:

- Desk shields
- Air filtration devices
- Sanitizing stations
- Social distancing signs and floor markers
- Personal Protective Equipment

Board of Education President Dr. John Lee Evans said the district hopes to implement on-campus learning with large numbers of elementary school students coming on campus following winter break on January 4. Similar to the first phase, Phase 2 would then grow to include middle and high school students, on Jan. 25, to coincide with the start of the third quarter. He said this timing was chosen to minimize any disruption academically.

“We are concerned by the continued spread of the virus in San Diego County but encouraged by the work of our educators and other employees to keep students safe at this difficult time,” Evans said. “Therefore, I believe it is important that we continue working towards a January start for Phase 2, even as we continue to monitor public health conditions and adjust. We will not hesitate to make any changes in this plan we deem necessary for the health and safety of our students, staff and community.”

Board Vice President Richard Barrera expressed concern over the high number of community outbreaks in San Diego County and reports the county could move into the state-designated Purple Tier later today, the highest risk level. Barrera said one of the reasons the district chose to begin with small group instruction based on set appointments is precisely because the model could continue even in the Purple Tier.

“We understand students and parents need stability at this time,” Barrera said. “That is why we have worked so hard to create sustainable models that will allow us to continue operating through difficult times.”

“Ultimately, all large school districts like San Diego Unified will need a robust COVID-19 testing system in place to be able to continue operating safely, and we are working hard with community partners to make that goal a reality,” Barrera concluded.

San Diego Unified is California’s second-largest school district. Since the start of the coronavirus crisis in March, the district has passed out more than 6 million free student meals, distributed over 85,000 Chromebooks, and provided millions of minutes in online instruction.

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