

March 13, 2020

Monterey County School Communities,

The safety and well-being of students, families, and school personnel are the highest priorities of all Monterey County schools, districts, and programs serving our infants, children, youth and young adults. Our school communities have been following guidance and directives from the local, state and national health departments.

Our state and local health and government entities have expressed the need to increase our preventative measures to reduce the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the various ways we as communities can work together to do so. There are no confirmed cases in Monterey County as of today, March 13, 2020, but in an abundance of caution and after long and careful deliberation, the Monterey County Office of Education and Monterey County School District Superintendents in conjunction with the Monterey County Health Department have decided to close all public schools and extracurricular programs in Monterey County schools for the remainder of March. Schools will be closed for students starting Monday, March 16 through Tuesday, March 31. Each district will communicate to their families regarding extending closure dates past March 31.

Our school staffs will work together during this time to prepare and explore options of alternate education methods. We also will work to ensure that throughout the closure, districts provide the vital services and resources our schools offer to our community, including, but not limited to, free and reduced meal programs. Schools will be contacting families in the coming days about services available to them throughout the closure.

Schools are an essential service and crucial to our communities. We are facing an unprecedented health crisis in our community, and new information is surfacing rapidly. It is probable our community will see cases of COVID-19 in the coming weeks and months and this will require a measured, sustained response.

While we recognize this decision may pose challenges and hardship to many families in Monterey County, the most effective way to slow and disrupt the transmission of this pandemic is by implementing social distancing practices. In order for these preventative measures to be effective, students should stay home and minimize social contact as much as possible to keep caregivers and adult family members safe. Children have not been shown to be a high-risk group for serious illness from this virus. However, they can transmit the virus to those most vulnerable. Public health officials recommend that families make arrangements for childcare during closure that avoid leaving children with elderly or those with compromised immune systems, those who are more vulnerable to the impact of the virus.

We know this decision creates a number of pressing questions and concerns. More detailed information will be shared as soon as possible about this unique situation, how employees will be impacted, and how families can support student learning during school closures. As a priority, we are working to provide nutrition services to all families in alternative formats.

As parents and caregivers, you are your child's first teacher, and you are your child's most influential teacher. Ongoing developments regarding COVID-19 may be overwhelming, especially to younger children. Parents and community members can help children and youth understand the situation better by discussing their specific questions and concerns. Resources for how to talk to children and youth about COVID-19 will be shared in future communications. This is a dynamic situation where information and circumstances can evolve quickly. For the latest updates, visit the California Public Health Department's 2019 novel coronavirus website at: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019> and for local health updates visit the Monterey County Health Department's 2019 novel coronavirus website at: <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>. The Monterey County Office of Education also provides school-related updates on its COVID-19 webpage at: <https://www.montereycoe.org/resources/alerts/coronavirus/>.

We also understand that implementing these changes with such limited notice is challenging and disruptive, and we appreciate your patience and cooperation. We are grateful to community members throughout Monterey County for their tremendous prevention efforts during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Dr. Deneen Guss, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools Jim Koenig, Alisal Union School District

Jonathan Sison, Big Sur Unified School District Ian Trejo, Bradley Union School District

Dr. Barbara Dill-Varga, Carmel Unified School District Roberto Rios, Chualar Union School District

Dr. Yvette Irving, Gonzales Unified School District Rosemarie Grounds, Graves School District

Zandra Jo Galvan, Greenfield Union School District Rory Livingston, King City Union School District Daniel Stonebloom, Lagunita School District

Dr. Jinane Annous, Mission Union School District

Dr. PK Diffenbaugh, Monterey Peninsula Unified School District Kari Yeater, North Monterey County Unified School District

Dr. Ralph Gómez Porras, Pacific Grove Unified School District Martha L. Martinez, Salinas City Elementary School District Dan Burns, Salinas Union High School District

Josh Van Norman, San Antonio Union School District Dr. Catherine Reimer, San Ardo Union School District Jessica Riley, San Lucas Union School District

Tim Ryan, Santa Rita Union School District Tim Vanoli, Soledad Unified School District

Dr. Brian Walker, South Monterey County Joint Union High School District Eric Tarallo, Spreckels Union School District

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