



Date: October 16, 2020

To: Board of Directors

From: Kevin Sved, CEO

Subject: Recommendation to Reopen No Earlier than January 11, 2021

Summary

Health conditions in Santa Clara County and Santa Cruz County allow for in-person instruction. San Benito County entered the Substantial (Red) Tier on October 14, allowing in-person instruction beginning October 28 if the current tier is sustained. Despite this opportunity, the health risks associated with reopening are significant. The impact of travel and family gatherings during the holidays and increased indoor activities associated with colder weather will impact viral spread. If the Board were to hypothetically decide to open as soon as possible, due to the required three to four weeks necessary to reopen for in-person instruction, coupled with the holiday schedule, we would only be able to have approximately two weeks of instruction before Thanksgiving and two weeks between Thanksgiving and the winter vacation. Much of that time would be focused on training students for classroom routines and procedures and new Covid-related safety protocols. The heavy lift for mobilizing the school community and the related disruption it would cause to the effective delivery of distance learning would not provide an overall benefit to our students.

The earliest viable on-site opening is January 11, 2021. The Board deciding this matter on October 19 will provide staff, students, and parents a level of certainty that will assist them in preparing for the remainder of the calendar year. It is recommended that the Board consider reopening for either Phase III (some grade levels) or Phase IV (hybrid) in-person instruction on January 11, 2021 during its meeting on December 8, 2020.

Background

During the August 25, 2020 Board Meeting, we discussed the various stages of on-site operations ranging from full virtual learning to a full return to school. These levels were based on varying degrees of capacity, as the lower the percentage of students, the lower the risk of viral spread. The stages were summarized as follows:

- Phase I: Virtual Only
- Phase II: Max 15% density -- Supplemental On-Site Learning
- Phase III: Max 25% (K-1 or K-2 possibly)
- Phase IV: Max 50% (hybrid K-5 or K-8)
- Phase V: Full in-person

Currently, the three schools are in phase II.

Additionally, the Board discussed the following as factors to be considered in moving from one phase to another:

1. Health and safety guidelines training and coherence
2. County approval based on COVID case metrics
3. Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction with virtual offering
4. Success of virtual offering in reaching academic outcomes
5. Preferences of families, students, and staff
6. Actions of local districts
7. Alignment on health policies and a plan for all relevant staff to be trained
8. Natural transition points in the school calendar

Current Community Status

At this time, the status in each of the counties and school districts where our schools are located is as follows:

	Tier and Time Period	Local District
San Benito	Substantial Tier (Red) as of 10/14	Hollister SD will not reopen before January 3
Santa Clara	Moderate Tier (Orange) as of 10/14	Gilroy USD will not reopen before January 2021
Santa Cruz	Substantial Tier (Red) as of 9/8	Pajaro Valley has not declared but highly unlikely to reopen in 2020-21

While Santa Clara is orange, cases within Gilroy’s zip code are among the highest within Santa Clara County.

Timeline Considerations When Changing Phases

When considering moving from one stage to another, it is suggested that we decide at least three to four weeks in advance as many cascading actions need to be completed, including:

- advance notification of families to plan for safe return to school, including coordinating transportation and childcare schedules, particularly if school is not back in full session for all students
- advance notification for staff to return to on-site reporting, many of whom will have to arrange for childcare or adult care. Some staff will also have to determine whether returning is safe based on their personal risk profile; they may instead opt for leave which can result in the need for additional hiring and training
- lead time to plan for training of staff to adhere to necessary safety protocols

It is important to note that the level of effort to mobilize a return from one stage to another will be significant, and will pose significant disruption to the distance learning that is currently in place.

Rationale for Not Returning Prior to January

Based on the need for a minimum of three to four weeks lead time, a decision made during the board meeting to return to school, while not recommended due to the uncertainty of the associated risks, would place reopening two weeks before the Thanksgiving break. Due to the likelihood of increased spread during the holidays when families gather and travel, it would not be advisable to return to school immediately after a break without some period for testing protocols to be implemented.

Providing an additional week break from on-site instruction following Thanksgiving vacation would leave yet again only two weeks of on-site operation before the winter break. Therefore, while it can be argued the two weeks of on-site instruction prior to Thanksgiving and two weeks before winter break could be meaningful educational experiences for children and provide a great opportunity to test a Phase III or IV implementation, the disruptions to the existing program and the related consequences of the mobilization effort outweigh the positives, particularly considering much of the instructional time will need to be devoted to establishing routines and training students on safety procedures. When factoring in the added health risks associated with virus spread and related impact on staff morale, planning for an opening prior to the new year is not advised.

Rationale for Reopening No Earlier than January 11

Students are scheduled to return from winter break on January 7, 2021 with staff returning for professional development on January 5, 2021. Providing a week for training and Covid testing of staff would be necessary in advance of opening. In order to open during the week of January 11, it would be important for the Board to make that decision during the Board meeting on December 8, pending the status of the virus in the relevant counties during the week of January 4th. The Board deciding this matter on October 19 will provide staff, students, and parents a level of certainty that will assist them in preparing for the remainder of the calendar year.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board determine that reopening of school at Stage III or greater will not occur prior to January 11, 2021.