



# DESERT SANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

47-950 Dune Palms Road • La Quinta, California 92253 • (760) 777-4200 • FAX: (760) 771-8505  
BOARD OF EDUCATION: Ana M. Conover, Donald B. Griffith, Wendy Jonathan, Linda Porras, Gary Tomak  
SUPERINTENDENT: Scott L. Bailey

October 05, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As we approach our 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the 180-day instructional year, I want to share the current status of our planning for in-person student learning opportunities. In the following, I will attempt to simplify a very complex challenge. You may recall that a new state-wide COVID-19 monitoring system was [announced](#) August 28, 2020. The [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#) relies on two leading health metrics: number of cases per 100,000 residents and percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive. Based on weekly data, each county falls into one of four tiers – Purple (Widespread), Red (Substantial), Orange (Moderate) and Yellow (Minimal). The Blueprint includes revised criteria for loosening and tightening restrictions on activities based on a county's tier status, including school reopening. Once a county meets the criteria for a move to a less restrictive tier, that county must remain stable for a period of 14 consecutive days before their status can officially change.

Riverside County recently met the criteria to advance from Tier 1 (Purple) to the less restrictive Tier 2 (Red). In Tier 2 status, schools may reopen for some in-person learning opportunities. Our 14-day data stabilization period ends October 06, 2020. Thus, if Riverside County remains in Tier 2 through that period, our schools may reopen for some in-person learning. Please note that school districts may provide in-person learning for small groups of students in most need of acute care, regardless of tier status.

In light of our current tier status, the Desert Sands Unified School District Board of Education recently requested a special meeting to discuss a potential timeline for the return to in-person learning, and to provide direction to staff accordingly. The special meeting was held on Wednesday, September 30, 2020. During the meeting, Board members revisited the instructional models (hybrid and distance learning) that are referenced in the [DSUSD Moving Forward](#) plan, and were provided a proposed timeline for implementation. The proposed timeline reflects a staggered return to in-person learning, beginning with students in most need of acute care and athletic conditioning on October 19, 2020. Elementary students participating in the hybrid model would potentially return November 09, 2020. Middle and high school students participating in the hybrid model would follow on January 04, 2021. An optional distance learning track will remain in effect. The transitions are purposefully placed at or near natural grading period breaks to mitigate the disruptive nature of any potential student to staff assignments and reassignments.

During the September 30, 2020, special meeting, the Board gave direction to staff to return to the October 06, 2020, regular board meeting with an action item to that regard. As this is a significant decision for the Board of Education, I strongly encourage your participation in the decision-making process. Although the proposed timeline and hybrid plan does move us closer to a much-desired opportunity to reconnect students and teachers in the traditional school setting, it does come with a cost. The stringent public health guidelines issued by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Riverside University Public Health (RUPH) severely limit learning model options. One of the greatest challenges is the social distancing requirement. Simply put, the number of students in a classroom space must be greatly reduced in order to comply with this requirement. Hence, the need for small cohort groupings of students on alternating schedules. Other CDPH and RUPH requirements include, among others:

- routine testing of staff
- use of face coverings for all children in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or higher and recommendation for face coverings 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and below
- a 14-day quarantine of students and staff as positive cases of COVID-19 are detected in the school setting
- potential school and or district closures based on positivity and case rate data
- contact tracing related to possible exposures.

The hybrid schedule is further complicated by student to teacher/staff assignments. A transition to the proposed hybrid model may cause the need to reassign some students and teachers/staff. Specifically, staff with health exemptions that permit them to work from home will by default become the distance learning teachers for students who wish to remain in distance learning for the remainder of the school year. All other staff will then be available for limited in-person learning opportunities at school sites. Ultimately, students in distance learning retain their home-school affiliation, although they are temporarily assigned to a "virtual school" environment.

*The Future Is Here!*



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Cont.

For example, students assigned to the virtual program will have opportunities to stay connected to their home school, and they will return to their home school setting once public health guidelines permit us to return fully to the traditional school setting. High school seniors will also graduate with their home school classes. Students who are on an approved transfer will be able to maintain their transfer status while enrolled in a virtual school.

I am hopeful that the aforementioned information will better equip you in understanding the complexities involved in the decisions that guide our path forward. We are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to return to in-person learning, but remain steadfast in our commitment to protect the safety and well-being of our 28,000 students, 2,800 staff, and our community. Thank you for your continued participation in the decision-making process. If you were not able to tune in to the most recent special board meeting, you may access the recording at this [link](#).

If you would like to share your input in advance of the upcoming board meeting, you may submit written comments online at this [link](#) (agenda item 22.1) prior to 2:00 p.m. on October 06, 2020. You may watch the livestream of the board meeting at this [link](#). As a parent/guardian, your participation in the process is invaluable.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in our lifetime and requires an unprecedented response. While the current situation has the unfortunate potential to disrupt and divide, let's choose to unify.

Sincerely,

Scott L. Bailey  
Superintendent