

Dear Families, Students, and Community Members,

I have had an opportunity to speak with district superintendents in Tuolumne County, our Public Health Officer, and have heard from other community members and know that the current communication released by the CDE and the Governor's Office has caused a great deal of anxiety as well as confusion. I have spoken to the State Superintendent (SPI) and to my county colleagues across the state and we are now clearer about the intent of the communication and how it relates to the decision we have made in Tuolumne County.

The language used in the communication from the SPI states "...it currently appears that our students will not be able to return to school campuses before the end of the school year." Superintendent Thurmond stated clearly that he understands local decisions may vary, but he wants to ensure that each and every school and district is well prepared to engage in distance-learning for the duration.

What does this mean for our recently communicated decision to suspend in classroom instruction through May 1st? It means that while the Governor and the SPI have stated that they do not believe schools will reopen, there is also an understanding that we as leaders must do what's best to stay connected to and serve our community as well. As I have spoken to the CDE, the Governor's Office, and the media, our message has been that we, as educational leaders, clearly understand the need to have plans in place should school not resume. I also made clear that we are working in close partnership with our public health department and want to ensure that current data and best health practices inform the decisions we make. We are still dedicated to the decision-making process we originally have put in place which includes our local Public Health Officer's guidance. As for the possibility of physical closures of school sites for the remainder of the school year, that is becoming more likely and a very real scenario. As the Governor stated in his April 1st briefing, "the expectation that schools are closed, but classes are in" guides our work from this point forward. As we consider this possibility, we will be implementing flexible learning opportunities, increasing nutrition options for all children, and seeking resources from the state to provide equitable access to learning for **ALL** children in Tuolumne County. This situation has illustrated that rural areas in California continue to be underserved not only in regards to Internet access, but also funding for education in general. District Superintendents and I are meeting later this week to discuss the recent developments and to make decisions related to a potential closure for the remainder of the year. At this time, schools in Tuolumne County are closed through May 1st.

Please be patient as schools pivot to this type of distance learning and be sure to connect with your school if you have not heard from them, as they are reaching out to all parents and students. All schools in the county have been, and are continuing to develop instructional opportunities to meet the needs of all students in all environments. Part of that work will be developing plans on how to ramp up support for students at the beginning of the next school year to help students make progress moving forward. As a community, you should be proud of the work that teachers, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, instructional aides, and other staff have been doing over the last few weeks. We will get through this trying time together.

Cathy Parker
Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools