

CAUSE ADVISORY

RE: In-Person Reopening

Q: Is CUSD An Island ? / A: No.

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District Employees, Parents, & Families,

Throughout the last two weeks, we have heard a variety of inaccurate claims, poorly developed musing, and uninformed statements from the mouths of those who direct the CUSD. Yes, "direct," not lead. Because to call them "leaders" seems a stretch.

With a straight face and with no indication that such statements simply don't add up, employees and District families have been told we will be returning to in-person instruction...

* yesterday, **October 1st, 2020**

...and...

* the day after SB County meets the County watch-list criteria, **October 13, 2020**, if those conditions are met, which is still a considerable uncertainty.

...and...

* on the date previously publicized by the Superintendent and School Board, **Nov. 1, 2020**

...and, most recently...

* in **January of 2021**; as recommended by the CHS and CMS Principals.

Although they could not all be possible, each statement has been made with conviction and certainty. Maybe you can figure out how they could all be accurate? The Union certainly can't.

As the confusion ensues, CUSD's directors struggle to appear relevant in the face of the uncertainty now exacerbated by their own impulsivity and negligence. So it seems some food for thought is appropriate.

CAUSE Leadership offers a lesson most of us, but clearly not all us, learned **before** we became adults...

" Simply because he/she/they can, doesn't mean he/she/they should."

If you look beyond the CUSD, there is reason to believe that genuine leaders in other districts understand this sentiment. Just take a look at **Santa Barbara Unified School District:**

<https://www.parentsquare.com/feeds/4572417?token=vnr9ZWmkbzw4mt8NX8y0fQ>

Or this, just in from **Ventura Unified School District:**

From: VUSD Superintendent
Sent: Thursday, October 1, 2020 2:30 PM
Cc: 'Carolyn Vang-Walker'
Subject: Message going out to families tonight regarding re-opening

Good afternoon VUSD team,

I want to take a moment to say thank you for all of the hard work you have been putting in. I have enjoyed "visiting" some classrooms this week and am happy to see our students engaged and interacting. I also see the hard work being done by our classified employees and administration teams behind the scenes keeping it all running. Thank you for all you do! The following message will be going out to our families this evening, and I wanted to be sure you saw it first.

Have a good evening,
Roger

Good evening VUSD community,

We want to thank our families for all they are doing to support their students in every way. We see you and know this has not been easy but are truly thankful for your patience. By now, many of you may have read the news that the COVID-19 numbers seem to be improving in our County. It is anticipated that if things keep progressing, the County could transition from the most restrictive tier (purple – widespread) to the next most restrictive (red – substantial). You are also likely aware that public schools are not allowed to open to in-person learning, when the County is in the purple tier unless a waiver is filed. Moving to the red tier would mean being able to legally open after 14 days have passed, so long as we are still in the red tier. This would mean we could legally open TK-12 operations on Oct. 21, following an announcement on Oct. 20 that we are still in the red tier and clear to open by the County.

I want to take this opportunity to update everyone on how things have been developing in VUSD's preparations for re-opening. First, it is essential to understand that even though we could soon be legally able to open to in-person instruction, we continue to face significant challenges that we must overcome before actually re-opening. This communication will outline those challenges to ensure that everyone understands what we are working on and how preparations are going.

Major Challenges

1. **Social Distancing** Being able to open legally does not eliminate social distancing requirements and wearing personal protective equipment. This is important because the requirement to maintain social distancing (keeping students and staff 6' apart) means:
 - a. Students will have to be divided up into cohorts so that no classrooms are overcrowded and so teachers can manage the social distancing of their students with minimal effort.

b. The suggestion that the District use outside space to accommodate more students is not feasible. Outdoor space can and will be used, but not for that reason. Even if we had enough equipment and space to set up enough classrooms to accommodate all students, we would need to double our teaching staff since only half the number of students would be in each group. This is not feasible for many reasons.

c. The need to maintain stable cohorts/groups of students means that the hybrid model that was approved by the Board in July is the likely model we would use when re-opening. For a draft of the what a hybrid schedule will look like please visit, <https://www.venturausd.org/Fall2020/Schedule.aspx>.

2. **Testing** Up until early this week, there had been no plan for testing all employees put forth by either the state or local health departments. Without their strong guidance, such plans would be expensive and would likely prevent us from providing such testing. Earlier this week, Dr. Levin of the Ventura County Public Health Office informed us –for the first time – that the County has enough capacity to support all school districts sending their employees to the Ventura County Fairgrounds to be tested for free. Questions and issues not addressed by Dr. Levin include the following:

a. When will employees go to get tested? During the school day, when teachers should be teaching? After-hours when they are not on duty? Both of these ideas raise issues that will need to be worked out with our employee labor representatives.

b. How will the test results be collected, if at all? Another issue that was just clarified this week for school districts was that the Districts, and not Public Health, would be responsible for collecting results and following up on any positive test results. This is a new development and means that we have to figure out a way to encourage/require employees to turn in their results when, currently school districts operate under legal restrictions regarding collecting this kind of personal health information. This is a problematic development to which there was no good answer provided by County Public Health.

c. Guidance was given to expect to test 25% of our employees every two months. This is not a small undertaking and will mean addressing the issues above and also assigning work to current employees and/or bringing in extra help to keep track of a large number of records and to follow up on positive test results.

3. **Secondary Schools** – Even more problematic than testing is the inability for secondary school programs (middle schools and high schools) to honor the current requirement to keep students in a single group. This is highly problematic because:

a. Students attend multiple classes with different students and teachers in each class. This practice would defeat the whole purpose of having stable cohorts. Dr. Levin shared his strong concern about this and said he would look into the issue for us and try to provide further guidance soon. During the conversation with Dr. Levin, Superintendents across the County agreed that if Dr. Levin requires students to be in stable cohorts after he has looked into it, then secondary schools will have to remain in distance learning until such cohorts are no longer required. This was also a problematic development.

b. Many have suggested that we have teachers move from classroom to classroom in secondary, unfortunately not all students are in the same classes and equipment is needed for different subjects that could not be moved easily by the teacher so this would not work as a potential solution.

c. Having some grade levels on distance learning and others not is challenging in many ways and would have to be worked out.

So moving forward, where are we?

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1. The employee assignment survey, for teachers, went out earlier this week, and we are getting a strong response from our staff. This survey will tell us which teachers want to remain in distance learning and have a reason for not being able to return when we are open. This is vital information.

2. Our survey of families also went out this week. This will provide us information on how many families want to return to in-person learning and how many do not. This is also vital information that we will need to match with item number one above. If you have not already taken this survey, please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VUSDFamilySurvey> and fill out one for each VUSD student in your family.

3. We are working on an idea to test employees on-site, which could help with the issues raised above about testing.
4. We have sent a team to look at classrooms in a neighboring district that are being used for small cohorts of SPED students. This will help us plan for our own class setups.
5. We have asked our teachers' labor representatives (VUEA) to review some ideas for starting small cohorts in SPED classrooms and hope to hear back from them in the coming days.
6. We still need to confer with our support personnel labor group (VESPA) in order to support those employees' needs as they relate to safety.
7. We have a Principals' meeting on Monday, which will give us a chance to discuss these issues from the site perspective.
8. Once the family and teacher surveys close next week, we will know how easy or difficult it will be to make appropriate assignments for both students and staff. The more students and staff that are willing to return to in-person instruction, the easier the match will be. If there are significant numbers of teachers and/or students who are not inclined to return to in-person instruction, then it will be more challenging and take longer to work through the issue.
9. We will bring our findings to the Board to gain their insight and feedback.

Thank you for your patience as we work through the many details and requirements that it will take to re-open our schools for in-person learning. As we have stated before, when we do re-open, we will continue to offer a distance learning model for those families who are not ready to return. When we have any significant updates, we will be sure to reach out. Again, please remember to take the family input survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VUSDFamilySurvey> no later than Wed., Oct. 7 at 10 am to make your voice heard.

Sincerely,

Dr. Roger Rice
Superintendent
Ventura Unified School District

Perhaps our District directors should look beyond the "group-think" that so consistently undermines their decision-making, to gain a better sense of the realities that accompany this COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps then, they will realize that CUSD is not an island, however much CUSD's directors wish to ignore all that surrounds us... and is us.

In Transparency,

~ j Hotchner * CAUSE President

*** C.A.U.S.E. - Yes We Can ***
[Please feel free to visit
to CAUSE website: <http://cause2216.org/>]

