

September 29, 2020

Dear St. HOPE Family and Scholars,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am reaching out today to provide you with an update on where we have been so far, where we currently are and what we are expecting to see in our future as it relates to COVID-19 and our schools.

March of 2020 brought about so many sudden changes as we began to grapple with the fact that there was a global pandemic and that it was not safe for schools to be physically open. During this time we made quick adjustments to our instructional model in an effort to find new ways to continue to be there for our St. HOPE community and overcome the challenge of not being able to share the same physical space with our scholars each and every day. Over the course of the summer we spent considerable time planning and preparing for the new school year. We created blueprint plans to operate under three potential models for the upcoming school year: distance learning, hybrid, and in-person learning. We knew that the 2020-21 school year was going to look different than any school year ever had, and that we needed to be prepared to adjust as often as necessary to follow health department guidance and ensure the safety of our entire community while also providing our scholars with the best learning environment possible. We made it a top priority to work collaboratively with our community of staff, teachers, scholars and families. This week marks the end of Quarter 1 for the school year and now we are once again making adjustments to ensure we are as best prepared for Quarter 2 as possible.

Last Tuesday, September 22nd Sacramento County reported COVID-19 data that met the criteria to move from the purple category on the state's watch-list down to the less-restrictive red category on the state's watch-list if it stayed at the required "red" levels for 14 consecutive days. If a county is in the red category, schools are allowed to reopen for in-person instruction. As of last Tuesday, Sacramento's COVID-19 positivity rate was 4.6%, well below the required 8% for the red category, and our adjusted case rate was 6.6/100,000, just meeting the criteria of having less than 7 positive cases/100,000. Today marks the 14th consecutive day of Sacramento County meeting the criteria to be reclassified as red. As of today, Sacramento County has a positivity rate of 4.6% and an adjusted case rate of 6.8/100,000. Therefore, as of today, Sacramento County has been officially moved into the red category.

The Sacramento County Health Department has indicated that they will be updating their guidance and recommendations for schools once we have remained in the red category for two weeks. If our county continues its current trend in reducing the number of COVID-19 cases, it is very possible that around Tuesday, October 13th, we will receive updated guidance from the Sacramento County Health Department that would allow us to physically reopen our schools. Receiving this updated guidance would be the first step in allowing us to finalize our preparations for a physical return to campus!

Each of our Site Leads have invited their families to a Zoom meeting this week to receive these updates and to review the core differences between operating a distance learning model and a hybrid model. We are asking our families to indicate their preferred choice for their scholars for Quarter 2 via an online survey. You will receive the online survey via email and text the morning after your school sites Zoom meeting. This information will allow us to finalize our plans. In this survey, you are choosing for your scholar(s) to remain on distance learning for the entire quarter (October 13-December 16), or to transition to a hybrid model once St. HOPE Public Schools reopen. Your decision is a commitment for the entire quarter and there will be no changes made mid quarter. We will provide families updated information and an opportunity to make their choice again for Quarter 3.

We realize there is a tension between being eager to bring scholars back on campus as soon as it is safe to do so while also wanting the transition to be as smooth as possible. Making a change in the midst of a quarter will certainly be more challenging than waiting for the start of a new quarter. At the same time, our scholars have been off campus for almost 7 months and we know there is a desire to return to the physical learning environment as quickly as possible. We will make every decision with the input of health officials and our stakeholders.

We are still planning on opening Quarter 2 in our distance learning model, as we do not yet have updated guidance from the Sacramento County Health Department at this time that would permit us to prepare for an in-person opening. However, we anticipate that changes are likely in the coming weeks, so we will continue to keep you updated on the latest information and adjustments as they emerge. We will also continue to seek your input so that our physical return to the campus is as smooth, successful and joyous as possible!

Thank you so much for your ongoing support and flexibility. We are pleased to hear the positive data from the County Health Department and hope that the trends continue in this direction. We are excited to be that much closer to having our scholars back on campus - they have been so missed!

Sincerely,
Kari Wehrly

The data included in this letter can be found here- <https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/#reopening-data>