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## Moving into the likely reopening of schools

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The current general thinking about the reopening of the schools in the fall is that a blended model will allow all students to be back in their schools at least several days a week. The push from parents is very strong to restore a more tangible link between the young people and their teachers. Plans depend on the county health services' order that is driven by public health data.

During a June 17 study session the superintendent of the Acalanes Union High School District, John Nickerson, cited a district parents survey which shows that only 5% of parents will want their children to continue distance-learning come the first day of school on Aug. 11. Numerous parents' comments in all three cities highlighted the desire to end isolation and free the youngsters to live their lives as kids. Keeping them and staff safe remains the number one concern for both parents and districts.

"The COVID-19 pandemic led us on a journey none of us thought we would experience in our lifetime," states the California Department of Education June report on safe reopening of the schools. To pave that new path, during the spring and beginning of summer, all the school districts continue working in committees of educators and parents to invent the new models of education. Schools are working on the three possible scenarios: 100% distance learning; blended model; or complete reopening. The blended model seems to be the most likely at this time. It is clear to all that being nimble and flexible will be key. During the coming school year, instruction may need to be delivered in different ways at different times, and districts are working on protocols if there is a local outbreak.

The blended model proposes physical presence of students, but in fewer numbers to accommodate the social distancing state requires, along with mask wearing.

The four Lamorinda school districts are working together to harmonize their schedule and minimize stress on families. The AUHSD at this time favors splitting the student body in half alphabetically and has designed a block schedule where student group A would be on campus Tuesday and Thursday, while student group B would be back to the classrooms on Wednesday and Friday. School will be taught online on the other days. Other models include a morning/afternoon divide of the students. Carrie Nerheim from the Orinda Union School District proposed to send packets home for families where the students have a difficult time accessing the material over the computer. That district, along the others, stressed the importance of keeping students with special needs in the loop and may be increasing those students' access to campus if a blended model is chosen.

Splitting the student body in half is not going to make matters simpler for working parents. Stephanie Richards for the Moraga School District indicated that spaces to provide childcare for about 90 students had been looked at in every school. The Lafayette School District is working with the Parks and Recreation Department, which already offers afterschool enrichment classes.

All the schools have noted that distance learning this spring semester has led to students' loss of motivation due to lack of accountability, no grading system and a multitude of platforms. The AUHSD has now adopted Canvas as the new platform that will be used in the blended and online models. It allows for tracking day-to-day student engagement and performance, according to AUHSD Aida Glimme, thus identifying those needing extra support. In the blended and online models, the AUHSD's Mondays will be dedicated to targeted interventions, counseling and wellness meetings, as well as extra-curricular offerings. Three hours on Monday afternoons are also planned for professional development. Teachers will need to learn the new platform and adapt their curriculum to the new normal(s).

The districts and their strategy committees are also revisiting the curricula, identifying essential standards. Mary Maddux of the Lafayette School District explained that cross grade level conversations were taking place to evaluate what the kids missed, how they will be assessed, identifying the gaps, and how teachers can move forward.

Even if campuses need to be closed for some time, the emotional well-being of the students will take prominence. Amy McNamara, who led the wellness group for the AUHSD, confirmed that whatever the model adopted, teachers will be trained to give a short emotional screening test to their students and will be asked to add in their classes routines of self-regulation. They will be encouraged to engage students in discussions, foster group connections, bring back a sense of fun in the classroom, whether online or on-site, and offer projects that are not screen time during online education.

A lot of other aspects are being worked on, such as access to campus, active or passive screening, arts classes, lab operation, extra-curricular activities, as well as food and transportation services. Of course, during this difficult budget situation, districts are scrambling to get funding for more custodial services, masks, gels, screens, and more.

The final model will likely be locked in mid-July.

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