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## Moving into the likely reopening of schools

By Sophie Braccini

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 pro-

poses 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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## Moraga Chamber's Town Hall meeting addresses COVID-19 related concerns

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However, they have received numerous complaints about people not adhering to social distancing and wearing masks. Brandt reminded residents that playgrounds, play structures, basketball and volleyball courts are still closed.

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker spoke about his crew having to work through the COVID-19 outbreak at the skilled nursing facility in Orinda, which resulted in almost all of its residents and a majority of the staff testing positive. "In response to that, we've enacted enhanced personal protective equipment measures to protect our firefighters and support from the Rescue One Foundation." He added, "We've sourced and put in service enhanced decontamination procedures for the back of the ambulance as well."

Saint Mary's College Assistant Vice President of Alumni and Community Engagement Mary Poppingo discussed the financial impact to the college and eventual need to cut costs, and cited the importance to "do all we can to get us back to doing what we do best, which is namely in-person instruction and providing students with a residential

experience." Fall classes are tentatively expected to resume Aug. 24, with the re-configuration of class size and on-campus housing layouts.

Acalanes Union High School District Superintendent John Nickerson, who assured everyone that the school district was closely examining state and county guidelines, touched on parental concerns regarding opening up schools. "Social distancing will be a challenge, but the basic model we're looking at is to do a six-foot distancing and to have no more than half the students in a classroom at a single time." Nickerson added that they will be depending on students' behavior and helping them understand they're doing social distancing for the community. Masks will be required.

Whether classes will be online or in-person is yet to be determined, but the district has plans for multiple scenarios: to open up and allow all students on campus at the same time, albeit with many restrictions; allow distance learning from home with opportunities to come to school; or a blended scenario whereby half the student body would be allowed on campus at a time with distance learning on other days (see related story above).

Moraga School District Superintendent Bruce Burns acknowledged the tremendous effort both teachers and parents have done to keep students on point with their learning agenda given the circumstances. The district distributed hundreds of computers to families for participation in distance learning. "MSD is planning to open on Aug. 11, and what it looks like now is yet to be determined," stated Burns. "Staff has been gathering research from across the county, state, country and globally to prepare for three opening scenarios." Hoping that schools resume at a high level of normalcy, there is the possibility of all instruction continuing via distance learning. A blended model would allow students on campuses part-time in conjunction with distance learning. The challenge of social distancing and mask wearing is being examined with input from a few schools that have remained open during the shelter-in-place order.

The MSD's budget is experiencing a COVID-19 shortfall. "Thankfully, we have a healthy reserve – a rainy day fund, but it is raining." Burns added, "We'll exhaust that shortly, and in addition, we'll need to make significant reductions."

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