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## Back to school with joy ... and COVID-19 guidelines

By Sora O'Doherty



Principal Brian Sullivan has resumed his practice of greeting students and parents daily during drop off and pickup at Donald Rheem Elementary School in Moraga. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Two of Lamorinda's three municipalities started the new school year with new superintendents, but everyone was well prepared for the challenges of keeping students safe while the COVID-19 pandemic lingers. All staff, teachers, and volunteers at area schools will be required to be vaccinated, a task that doesn't present much of a challenge with local vaccination rates hovering around 90%. With few exceptions, everyone on campus will be required to be masked when indoors. For those who, for health reasons, cannot be masked, alternatives include face shields with a drape affixed to the bottom edge.

Julie Parks, former principal of Orinda's Miramonte high school, now superintendent of the Moraga School District, posted a 20-minute video to YouTube, explaining the complex and sometimes confusing requirements for home health checks, hygiene and sanitation, daily classroom cleaning, masking, testing, and quarantining, along with updated information on ventilation and air quality. She explained how requirements are filtered down from the national level, where the Center for Disease Control makes recommendations, that are adapted for California by the California Department of Health, from which the Contra Costa County health services come up with local policies for implementation.

There will be quarantine requirements for persons exposed to active COVID-19 infected individuals, and those requirements vary with vaccination and mask status. On the bad news side of the balance, there will be no field trips from Moraga schools for the foreseeable future, but on the positive side, the school hot lunch program will continue. More good news is that when students are masked, social distancing is not required.

Families will be expected to perform home health checks daily, and to keep students home from school if ill, but they will no longer be required to submit verifications. Teachers will continue to provide schoolwork for students who must stay home because of illness or exposure, but will also offer support upon the child's return to school. COVID-19 testing will be offered throughout the local school districts, so that everyday testing will be available, if not at a child's school, at a school not too far away.

All of the schools in the districts have updated HVAC systems that provide filtered air. If air quality is poor, the classrooms can be closed to rely on the improved air quality indoors, but if the air quality is good, opening classrooms to fresh air will be encouraged. Classrooms will be cleaned daily. Additional cleaning supplies will be available in classrooms, and students will be encouraged to wash their hands often, with sanitation stations remaining on campus in addition to well-supplied bathrooms. In the event of a case of COVID at school, the affected classroom will be cleaned and disinfected. In addition, in the event of a case at school, contact tracing will be effected.

By late Friday afternoon, Aug. 13, messages started appearing on social media with parents complaining about "very vague" notices from the Orinda Union School District regarding positive cases within the OUSD school community. Another parent said they received notification from the Acalanes Union School District.

Contacted by The Lamorinda Weekly, new OUSD superintendent Aida Glimme responded to the parents' concerns on Saturday, Aug. 14. She explained that the district is following the same communication protocols given to them by the county, required by the California Department of Public Health.

Glimme said that OUSD would start a COVID-19 dashboard this week. She discussed how the district is trying to navigate a very difficult situation, striving to protect students from being ostracized while at the same time providing as much information as possible to those who may have immunocompromised family members. She herself is a parent in exactly that situation. The new superintendent said that she planned to send more information on the process to parents on Aug. 16.

Glimme clarified that the district is practicing a strict contact tracing protocol. Persons who have been within six feet of a person identified as testing positive for COVID for at least 15 minutes are considered close

contacts. Parents of students deemed close contacts will be notified by a telephone call immediately. Quarantine requirements depend on a number of circumstances, including whether or not the person was masked and/or vaccinated.

In response to the desire of some parents for more information and more transparency, the district is also notifying parents of students who were not in close contact with a case but are in the same classroom. This was not done last year.

Glimme said that as a parent and an administrator, she is very sensitive to the situation in which parents now find themselves. But she also wants to squash the rumor mill. "We want to be really transparent without violating student privacy in this very delicate situation," she said. Some parents feel that there is too much communication, and other parents want to know everything. The district is trying to thread the needle of being transparent while also protecting sensitive medical information.

Lastly, Glimme emphasized that there have been no cases of COVID-19 being transmitted at school because school has just returned to session. Cases being reported now happened over the summer break.

"It's a really hard time that we are dealing with, a new reality that we are trying to navigate," Glimme acknowledged. "What can we as a community do outside of school to prevent the spread of COVID at school?"

To view local school district information, visit:

<https://www.lafsd.k12.ca.us>

<https://www.moraga.k12.ca.us>

<https://www.orindaschools.org>

<https://www.acalanes.k12.ca.us>

Dr. Parks' video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rAxIjNUo2w>

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