
STATEMENT ON RETURN TO SCHOOL



With school doors reopening to some but not all families who want to return, concerns linger about accelerating inequities across the district, as well as plan for summer and fall

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April 18, WEST CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CA – West Contra Costa Safe Open Schools (WCCSOS) – a group of parents, caregivers, students, educators, and community members from across West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) – is celebrating the reopening of school campuses for limited in-person hours this week as a critical first step toward the goal of a safe, full-time reopening for all students who wish to return.

“We are immensely grateful to the hardworking school staff, district staff, and school board members who labored through their spring break to prepare to reopen campuses to students, and we’re thrilled for the kids and families who get to return to school for the first time in more than a year” said Jennifer Peck, parent and WCCUSD community leader. “However we’re concerned by inequities we’re seeing in the return-to-school plan across school sites throughout the district, and we’re especially alarmed by the still unquantified number of families who wanted to come back but have been told there’s no space for them.”

Superintendent Matthew Duffy has reported that only 51% of certificated staff and 83% of classified staff have opted to participate in the voluntary return-to-school plan, and reports have emerged about a number of schools that have been forced to deny students, entire classes, or even entire grades the opportunity to return during the hours specified by the new MOU. In addition, school sites have adopted a range of return-to-school schedules and in-person offerings, resulting in an uneven and inequitable delivery of education to the more than 29,000 students across the 50 schools in the district.

“During the March 24th board meeting, Dr. Wold assured all of us *many* times that there would be space available for *any* family that wanted to return, and yet that is not the case,” said Carrie Hobbs Schulman, parent at Harding Elementary School in El Cerrito. “My high-performing kindergartner has been invited to go back, while my struggling second grader has to remain in distance learning because his teacher isn’t returning and the district hasn’t yet found anyone to staff a hub.”

The district has reported that they are tracking the data on how many students requested to return, how many the district is able to serve, as well as the total number of students who requested but were denied participation. To ensure full transparency, WCC Safe Open Schools believes this information should be made public. Members of the group's legal representation will be making a public information request to the district for this data to determine the number of students who have been denied the opportunity to return to school, as well as potential inequities in offerings.

WCC Safe Open Schools commends the efforts of WCCUSD board members who are going to great lengths to personally ensure the greatest possible success of the return to school plan. Trustees Reckler, Gonzalez-Hoy, and Christian have publicly committed to volunteering to supervise school site hubs at schools with staffing gaps to give more students the chance to return.

Looking ahead, WCC Safe Open Schools encourages the district to share information about the summer program that has been promised, beginning with including the plan for summer as an agenda item in the next public board meeting.

"After more than a year at home, I'm elated my kindergartener gets to have his first day of school on campus and experience his school in person, even for just two hours, three days a week," said David Concepcion, parent in the district. "But with the lack of communication about the summer program and the number of families I know who've been denied the chance to go back, at this point, I am still very worried about the viability of full-time school in the fall."

West Contra Costa Safe Open Schools believes:

- Students in California have a fundamental right of equal access to an effective public education. Distance Learning is not as effective as in-person instruction, by any means.
- Distance Learning is having a devastating effect on student well-being.
- Science and data show that schools can reopen safely for students, teachers, and staff when strong mitigation measures like masks, distancing, and hand washing are in place.
- Distance Learning is disproportionately impacting marginalized students, including those with disabilities, English-language learners, and Black and Latino children, who make up a large proportion of students in WCCUSD.
- Teachers and school staff should be a high priority for COVID vaccination.

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