



Faced With COVID-Driven Instability, District 49 Reinstates E49
November 6, 2020

Dear D49 Families, Students, and Staff,

We are completing a very disruptive week in our community and in District 49. Our region has measured thousands of new COVID cases including 35 confirmed cases involving D49 students and staff. Two thirds of our schools have active precautionary quarantines affecting nearly 1,100 staff and hundreds of staff members. The staff who remain are stretched incredibly thin as we cannot secure enough substitute teachers, and there aren't enough adults to cover all assignments. It is straining our students and their families as well as the entire workforce family, with teachers and nurses especially impacted by unpredictable overloads. Five schools, serving over 4,400 students, have been displaced into E-Learning with less than a day's notice. We've also seen our first school-based outbreaks (two of them), and two cases of verified, in-district transmission. The three-stage pattern of upheaval is now evident and inevitable. Surging infection cases from the community flow into our schools, creating quarantines that deplete our on-site staff, and in-person learning shuts down. Our schools are losing stability, and community conditions are beginning to compromise safety. **Therefore, District 49 will transition back to E-Learning (E49) for most students-- all programs, PK-12-- on Monday, Nov 9, 2020.**

We understand and share the collective desire for more advanced notice about this transition. Unfortunately, the impacts of COVID disruptions accelerated so abruptly this week, that our timeframe to decide and communicate has been compressed. Rather than continuing to close in-person learning with less than a day's notice, we decided to use as much of the weekend as possible for planning and adjustments. Every quarantine is disruptive, but switching whole schools to E-Learning with only hours to plan is chaotic for students' learning and overloads our staff and families. The nature of the virus means we can't predict which schools will go virtual tomorrow, but we can project that the number will multiply--especially by next Monday. We've passed the point where we can stay in front of this wave. It will overwhelm our district if we don't reposition to the higher ground of E49.

Over the past 8 months, our community has experienced four waves in the pandemic, measured by the case rate per 100,000 on a 14-day average.

- The first wave peaked with an average case rate of 55 (per 100K) on April 6. That wave receded to 32 on April 30.
- The second wave climbed to 58 on May 26 and then receded to 29 on June 16.
- The third wave climbed to 155 on July 29 and then receded back to 53 on September 11.

Each of these waves demonstrated time symmetry, taking about as long to recede as they did to build up. We are now in the upslope of a fourth wave, with case rates/100K already over 500 on November 5. As of today, there are over 3,700 active cases in our community. This wave has been building for 8 weeks, and recent spikes in transmission and test positivity ensure that it will keep climbing for quite some time—possibly cresting through the holiday season and into the new year. When it does recede, this wave will take many weeks to return to the yellow or blue levels of Safer at Home. Since schools are downstream of the community, we don't anticipate returning to stable in-person conditions until some time in 2021. **As a result, E49 will be in effect at least through the rest of this semester.**



Our parents, students, and staff have done a superlative job of keeping schools safe, but we've reached our limit. While we haven't been perfect, our caution about symptoms and safety has secured 8 strong weeks of in-person and hybrid learning for families who wanted that option. We've built a foundation of learning and relationships that will serve us well as we transition back to E49. This is the decision we didn't want to make and the announcement we didn't want to draft, but we believe this is the responsible way forward - instead of rolling the dice and waiting to see which schools go virtual next.

The next several days will be confusing as all of us experience what many have already gone through, the short-notice transition to virtual learning. Learning will be disrupted, and all of our work will be impacted. Just as we did back in April, we'll use the first day of E49 for students and teachers to gather materials and plan for next steps. That means Monday, November 9 will be a pause day for all teacher-directed learning. Students may keep working, but teachers and other staff will meet, plan, relocate where necessary and begin the transition process for all learners. Some class groups will change as we rebalance teaching loads and reorganize cohorts of students.

Our teachers and other staff are more prepared than ever to deliver quality instruction during E49. We learned a lot last spring, and we continue learning and adapting as we serve almost a third of our students who opted for remote instruction. Our plans for device distribution will look different, as we work to give schools more local control of that process. Our process for grab-and-go school meals will look different too, as we establish locations and schedules to provide free school meals. We already have great participation in our before and after-school program called Base49, but we will work to increase capacity and availability of that resource during E49. Sadly, the decision to prioritize stability and safety will also suspend any sports or co-curricular activities that cannot shift to a virtual mode. Nearly all of our Season A sports have concluded, and Season B sports don't start practice until January, so we hold out some hope that conditions will improve enough to support those activities.

D49 is going virtual, but we're still open for business. Our staff will continue working around the district and all of our schools, programs and operations will keep serving during E49. We will offer some on-site programming for students and groups that need in-person support, just as we did in late August, but we need to establish the best population and duration for those services. In particular, we will prioritize individualized services for students with learning plans, interventions for at-risk students, and core instruction support for our youngest learners.

As a district of choice, we are proud to authorize a community of excellent charter schools, each with its own governing board and unique community conditions. Although the shift to E49 will limit our district's ability to provide a full suite of services, we will collaborate with individual schools and their leaders to support their decisions and plans.



We fully understand that this announcement does not have sufficient detail to fully guide our transition. For this weekend and the start of next week, we ask that everybody stay attentive for more information from departments and schools.

We thank you for your patience, understanding and trust. We will walk forward together with respect, care and our shared commitment to delivering excellent education in stable and safe environments.

Sincerely,

Peter Hilts
Chief Education Officer

Brett Ridgway
Chief Business Officer

Pedro Almeida
Chief Operations Officer