

Dear Simi Valley Schools Community:

I hope that this message finds you healthy and enjoying your summer break.

For our entire team at Simi Valley Schools, this summer has been about preparing for the 2020-2021 school year. As of today, we are a month away from the August 17 start date. After much consideration and consultation with county and state officials, Simi Valley Unified School District will start the school year in a Virtual (online) Learning model, with the understanding that as soon as it is deemed safe enough by local and state health officials, we will begin phasing in our Blended Learning model as an option for our families.

This was an extremely difficult decision to make, and there are many reasons for it. Given the current local Covid-19 conditions, we weighed the risks of exposure and infection in students and staff against the social-emotional concerns for our students stemming from social isolation and the physical disconnection to friends and trusted adults. As of right now, we believe that the health risks to staff and students is too great to justify starting the school year with any form of in-person instruction.

We are not alone in making the decision to start the school year with Virtual Learning. Currently almost every public school district and charter school in Ventura County has committed to online learning for the opening of the 2020-2021 school year. The few districts still undecided are awaiting direction from upcoming school board meetings, and are expected to follow us into online learning. Yesterday, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Stan Mantooth received the endorsement of Dr. Robert Levin, Ventura County Public Health Officer, to delay in-person instruction at all schools and instead use online instruction for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. In his response, Dr. Levin said, "I concur with your decision to (start) the 2020-2021 school year with distance learning and without students returning to campus until it is safe to do so. We have seen a significant and worrisome jump in COVID cases in our county over the last 5 weeks."

We know that this decision will strongly impact most of our families. We are concerned as well on many levels, for our families and our staff. *What we are not concerned about is the high-quality instruction we will be able to provide through Virtual Learning starting next month.*

Last spring, we were given no notice when we were told to close schools for what would be the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Our teachers had to completely change direction mid-stream on their instructional practices and without immediate training or, in some cases, technology. Our teachers and support staff rose bravely to this challenge, resulting in many students adapting and learning under the new processes. But many other students and their families struggled.

Since then, we have been able to identify and correct the barriers to instruction. As we face the new school year, our teachers and support staff are receiving specific training on the best online teaching practices. As educators, we know that online instruction might not be ideal for every student, but we also know that with our careful, intentional guidance, our students can learn and thrive within this model. We have crafted our Virtual Learning model based partly on the information our families provided to us along with the best practices learned by us and other educators during this crisis. The result is a plan that provides greater consistency in instructional practices and greater access for our students and families. Below is our commitment to you and our plan for making our Virtual Learning model as successful as possible for our students.

Please read through the following information carefully. As with everything we have shared since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, things can change with no notice.

One of the larger questions from our last communication on June 26 was whether we would be able to offer virtual learning as an option for Fall under Assembly Bill 77. The answer is yes, we can offer virtual learning for the Fall to our families.

Our first student day of school for the 2020-2021 school year will be **Monday, August 17, 2020**. This will allow for us to provide professional development for our teachers, training for staff and to implement health and safety protocols. As we outline what Virtual Learning will look like in the Fall, we have divided the information into elementary and secondary (middle and high school) paths.

At ALL grades, Virtual Learning will provide:

- Daily instructional time with teachers.
- Regular office hours for teacher contact.
- A consistent schedule.
- Consistent tools for classroom management and instruction.
- All students will be assigned a Chromebook.
- Attendance will be taken.
- Assignments will be graded and will count just as during a “normal” school year.

What all families need to know about Virtual Learning:

- If a family chooses to leave SVUSD for other options, we cannot guarantee that a student returning at a later date will be allowed to re-enroll in a School of Choice or Fundamental School at that time. That decision can only be made if there is space available at that time for that returning student. Students will always have the option of returning to their SVUSD neighborhood school.

- Each school will contact parents before the first day of school to make arrangements for picking up materials, textbooks and Chromebooks.

VIRTUAL LEARNING: ELEMENTARY STUDENTS
(Grades JK/TK to 5 and 6th grade on elementary school campuses)

- Students will be assigned to a classroom/teacher at the start of the school year.
- Teachers will offer two live sessions daily, a morning and afternoon session.
- Students will have the option to participate in either the morning or afternoon session. (When we are able to expand on our educational options, students will then need to be assigned to a particular session.)
- There will be assignments provided online by the teacher, which will need to be accessed, completed and turned in online.

VIRTUAL LEARNING: SECONDARY STUDENTS
(Grades 7 to 12 and 6th grades on middle school campuses)

- All secondary students will take at least two classes at a time in approximately 6-week long sessions. By arranging the students' schedules in this manner, the students will be able to fully focus on those two classes at a time, without the added pressures of juggling six or seven classes at once. (This is the model most summer school programs use.) By the end of the semester (December), each student will have completed all of their required classes for this first semester.
- Each class will have a morning session and an afternoon session. Students will have the option to participate in either session. (When we are able to expand on our educational options, students will then need to be assigned to a particular session.)
- Students will also have additional opportunities equivalent to periods 0, 7 or 8 during a "normal" school year.
- Periods 0, 7, and 8 will meet daily before 8 a.m. (Period 0) or after 3 p.m. (Periods 7 and 8).
- Teachers will provide assignments online, which will need to be accessed, completed and turned in online.

As of today, extracurricular activities and athletics will be offered to the extent that is feasible. We are waiting on local and state agencies for guidance on what this will look like in the immediate future. As soon as we know, we will advise our families.

Breakfast and lunch services will be provided daily on a grab-and-go system at several schools sites throughout the district. Next week, a message will be sent to all families with much more information. This is not the free-meal program we were able to use over the

spring and summer. It is the regular school year meal program, except it will be for pick-up instead of for eating on-site. Families who qualified last year for free-and reduced meals will continue to be qualified. We will provide applications next week for new families to qualify for the free-and-reduced meal program. For those who do not qualify for free meals, the prices for breakfasts and lunches will remain the same this year.

For our Special Education families: We are waiting for guidance from our state and federal officials on what services can be offered and how. We will advise these families as soon as the information is provided to us.

Lastly, we continue to be concerned about the social-emotional welfare of our students and their families. Extended periods of social isolation can be detrimental to our families. Our website, www.simivalleyusd.org, has a section dedicated to Covid-19 information, and includes many resources for mental health and counseling needs at all age levels. We will update this section in the coming weeks to provide more information and resources.

Once again, I have to thank all of you for your support and patience. This crisis is impacting all of us, and we will continue to update our families regularly in the coming weeks. Please stay healthy and safe for the remainder of your summer and know that your schools will reach out to you as well with information specific to each campus.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jason Peplinski
SVUSD Superintendent