



February 18, 2021

Dear Jefferson School District Community,

The Jefferson School District Board and I remain committed to bringing students and staff back to school safely. A few districts in San Joaquin County brought students back to in-person instruction in November. Even during the surge in December and January these districts were able to maintain the safe in-person operation of their schools. Jefferson School District (JSD) took a more conservative approach, looking for lessons learned and using the time to put more safety measures in place for students and staff.

While many of the districts open to in-person instruction have chosen full-day schedules, JSD selected a partial day schedule to avoid having students on campus during unstructured activities such as lunch and recess where the possibility of transmission is higher. JSD also upgraded HVAC filters throughout the District and went even further by purchasing hospital grade HEPA filtration units for each classroom in the district to improve air circulation per CDC recommendations. When it was recommended that school districts provide staff with asymptomatic COVID testing, we contracted with Quest labs to have tests sent to staff member's homes. However only 30% of staff members took advantage of the free testing. On January 14, 2021 when CDPH updated their guidance again to recommend voluntary staff and student asymptomatic COVID screening weekly, the District contracted with the State's testing lab. The JSD COVID testing facility had a soft opening today. The testing facility will be open for staff the following week and students when we return to in-person instruction. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was purchased for each school site, which includes surgical masks, hospital grade hand sanitizer, gloves, mechanical barriers, and signage. Finally, in partnership with San Joaquin County Public Health Services and San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE), educators throughout the county are beginning to receive COVID-19 vaccines this week. What we do know is JSD continues to go above and beyond other school districts across the state that have safely reopened to in-person instruction.

Based upon all of the safety measures put in place, it was clear that JSD schools were safe to continue the Board's phased opening to in-person instruction on February 16, 2021. Despite the negotiated Memorandum of Understanding with the Jefferson Teacher Association, on February 12, 2021 students, families, dedicated teachers and the District were blindsided by the by the cease and desist letter from the California Teachers Association (CTA) Legal Department in Sacramento on behalf of the Jefferson Teachers Association (JTA). The District responded to this letter with supporting documentation received on February 12, 2021 from San Joaquin County Public Health Services. The letter affirms that Jefferson School District is acknowledged as being open and as a result may carry out its planned in-person reopening. When the District did not receive a response from CTA/JTA it had no choice but to notify parents and heartbroken students of the fact that school would not be able to start on February 16, 2021 as planned. The District wanted to make sure parents had time to plan for childcare and other necessary arrangements. The District hoped to receive a response from CTA/JTA accepting the supporting documentation from the local health authority. Instead on February 16, 2021 JTA leadership requested additional legal documentation further challenging the ability for the District to continue its phased opening.

Jefferson School District does not believe it is in the best interest of our students to litigate with the California Teachers Association the nuances of what the word "open" means or who has the legal authority to constitute a school district "open" for in-person instruction. For this reason, the Board has decided to set an opening timeline that is clearly defined and defensible without further legal action. San Joaquin County's adjusted case rate is currently 25.1 cases per 100,000. It is expected this will drop well below the required 25 cases per 100,000 on February 23, 2021. The District will be required to wait five additional days before it continues its phased opening plan. For this reason, in-person instruction for TK-6th grade students that requested to return to in-person instruction will begin Wednesday, March 3, 2021. The District will continue to work with CDPH to determine when it is eligible to begin in-person instruction for 7th and 8th grade students.

Sincerely,

James W. Bridges
Superintendent