

A Message from ABLE Superintendent, Clem Lee

Friday, September 25, 2020

Greetings, ABLE Families!

As we wrap up the third week of distance learning let's talk about where we are in terms of that which is in everyone's heart and mind: reopening school for in-person teaching and learning.

The process for monitoring each county's COVID-19 status and the implications for reopening schools and businesses has changed several times over the months. At one time it seemed predetermined that we would probably not reopen until after the first of the year. But the winds they are a changin', and, as a few schools have reopened under waivers there is increased interest in ABLE's plans.

More families are inquiring: When will ABLE re-open?

Here is where we are.

- Our distance learning model is up and running. Families and students receive multiple levels of support. The best distance learning model is not perfect, but feedback is positive, and when there are problems, ABLE addresses them quickly.
- The state's Watchlist was replaced by the Governor's Blueprint for a Safe Economy which categorizes each county according to COVID-19-related metrics and spells out the pathway to schools' reopening. San Joaquin County, although slowly improving, remains in the purple "widespread" category. Once San Joaquin County moves into the orange "substantial" category, ABLE could reopen in fourteen (14) days.
- There is a waiver process under which a few county schools have reopened with the approval of the San Joaquin County Department of Public Health. Waivers can only be granted for grades TK-6.
- The granting of even a few waivers has excited families with the hope that reopening can happen sooner than later. ABLE is considering applying for a waiver weighing the rewards of re-establishing traditional teaching and learning against what remain to be very serious risks. Consider:
 - We know that our youngest learners have the most difficulty in distance learning.
 - We know that the challenges of supervising and assisting young children in distance learning places significant burdens on families.
 - We also know that COVID-19 remains a very serious health issue and that even with safety and sanitation protocols in place, the spread of COVID-19 is still a risk that extends beyond students and staff to potentially compromised family members at home.
 - A few or even one positive COVID-19 diagnosis at ABLE upon reopening could cause panic and would most likely drive students and staff back home.

- We feel we must avoid putting ABLE and our families in a position of toggling back and forth between distance learning and reopening if COVID-19 conditions become fluid.
- Most health experts predict a new surge of cases as we enter fall, which is now
- You will agree that there is much to consider in planning the pathway to reopening and that, without a crystal ball, there is a lot that can go wrong. And when families' health is at risk, families will rightly make their own decisions regardless of what ABLE or anyone else might be trying to implement. Families will ultimately make their own decisions about their safety and do what they feel they need to do.

Here is how ABLE will proceed:

1. ABLE will remain in distance learning and will provide at least two weeks' notice of any plans to reopen.
2. ABLE will closely monitor the few schools that have reopened and learn from their experiences to develop some predictability about reopening here.
3. ABLE will continue to reach out to families for feedback about our current model and students' current experiences.
4. ABLE will study the waiver applications of the reopened schools and begin to study the waiver process for ABLE. **Please be clear that ABLE is not currently preparing to submit a waiver. When and if we do, ABLE families will be informed.**
5. ABLE will continue to develop its reopening plan in anticipation of the day that schools can reopen county-wide.

We know we surveyed you over the summer, but circumstances have changed significantly. We need every ABLE family to complete the survey at the end of this post AS SOON AS POSSIBLE so that we can gauge the interest in reopening under a waiver as well as under other scenarios that are possible. Without solid information about families' wishes we cannot plan appropriately.

The year is going well – as well as can be. We all long for a return to normalcy. We appreciate your help in planning to get there.

[Complete the survey here](#). Each family need only complete one survey. Thank you.

Message Reprinted from September 8, 2020, the First Day of School

ABLE family – students, parents, teachers, staff, you are a part of history.

You made it through the first day of school via distance learning in the extraordinary pandemic year of 2020. You are part of something that has not been done before, and you have no real idea how long it will last. Your experience today – and this year – is truly historic.

- Clem Lee, ABLE Superintendent