



Steve M. Tietjen, Ed.D. | County Superintendent of Schools

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May 15, 2020,

Dear Merced County District Superintendent and District School Board Members,

We just completed a call this afternoon with our counterparts at the Merced County Department of Health, Health Officer Dr. Salvador Sandoval and Supervising Epidemiologist Kristynn Sullivan. The direction provided to schools was that any graduation ceremony that brought families and students together on an in-person basis would not be approvable at this time and not probable throughout the summer months. This is due to the continued growth of cases of COVID-19 in Merced County and the need to not unnecessarily expose families to the virus with no hope of being able to trace the infection back to the point of origin. We do hope that a late summer in-person graduation event might be scheduled based on a Stage 3 status declaration.

Of deep concern is exposure and cross-contamination of family members in Merced County with other family members visiting a graduating senior from out the area. Therefore, it is out of an abundance of caution that I provide this direction in coordination with Public Health officials.

Our recommendation is for districts to provide an online or drive-through event whereby family members can be safe and our graduates can receive the praise and congratulations of their family members. I know how important this rite of passage is for our young adults. As I have presided over graduation ceremonies for 25 years, I have always seen the event as the moment when our young people take their place in American society as a fully empowered adult who is ready to begin their adult life. I do grieve that the current class does not have this moment together with their classmates. I believe that they will be leading a unique generation of young people who can look in retrospect at the loss of this moment as a step to gaining another one, beating a disease the likes of which the world has not seen for 100 years.

Here's to the Class of 2020

Sincerely,

Steve M. Tietjen, Ed.D.  
County Superintendent of Schools  
Merced County Office of Education

Salvador Sandoval, MD, MPH  
County Health Officer  
Merced County Department of Public Health