

Temporary School Closure Protects Public Health

Temporary school closures are unprecedented at the local, national and global level as we deal with the COVID-19 health crisis. As Merced County Superintendent of Schools, my greatest responsibility is to provide direction to our local school districts, direction that prioritizes the safety and health of students and school communities.

Therefore, Merced County schools will temporarily close on Thursday, March 19, with a planned reopening on April 20. We are constantly assessing the situation as it changes, and with that in mind, we will consult with public health officials to determine if schools will remain temporarily closed longer than the currently proposed timeline.

We know the decision to close public schools has an impact on every other part of our society. It impacts our students, employees, families, neighborhoods and businesses. Education leaders across the county — from all 20 school districts and private schools — are unified in putting the health of our students and school communities first, which is why they agreed on a common plan for closing schools. The length of time for the closing was tied to the incubation cycle of the virus. Our County Health leaders recommended that we keep our schools closed for two incubation cycles so we would have the greatest chance to stop the virus from spreading.

It is crucial during this temporary school closure that we follow the guidelines and recommendations from public health officials. We all should try to remain at home and practice social distancing. If we must leave our homes for essential things like food, our trips should be constrained by guidelines established by our local, state and federal officials.

Our school districts will provide engaging learning activities and education resources for our students during this temporary closure. Especially for our younger students, this will require assistance from a parent or guardian. Many resources for your children can be accessed on our website found at the end of the article.

Schools will also continue to provide healthy eating options for students. Some school districts will use their school sites as pickup locations and others in the more rural parts of our county will utilize bus routes and drop off prepared meals.

More information about school meals, learning activities and other resources are available at <https://mcoe.org/covid19>.

We understand that there are still a lot of unanswered questions and uncertainty on what happens next. We will communicate regularly through social media and our partners in the news media. Please check the website regularly for updates, making sure to watch the most recent posting. We are grateful to community members throughout Merced County for their tremendous prevention efforts during these challenging times.

Steve Tietjen, Ed.D.
Merced County Superintendent of Schools