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Date: August 27, 2021

To: Families of Santa Cruz County

Re: Commitment to in-person school, additional mitigation measures, expanded testing

Dear Families of Santa Cruz County,

Thank you for your ongoing diligence and dedication to our students and schools. Embarking into an in-person school year during a variant-driven surge in COVID-19 cases in our community has no doubt been a challenge. Students, families, educators and support staff have our enduring support and appreciation for navigating this moment with such grace.

We write to you today to share several important updates and developments. Yesterday, Santa Cruz County and Bay Area Health Officers [released a statement](#) reaffirming their commitment to in-person school, citing the disruption to education, weakening social supports, and harms to mental health caused in the absence of in-person learning. **This commitment to safe in-person school is a position we firmly share.**

We are grateful to the parents who have kept sick children home and to our school personnel who have diligently implemented COVID-19 mitigation strategies, including isolation/quarantine protocols. This week we have **expanded testing to thousands of students across the county**, and worked closely with Public Health on contact tracing. This increased testing effort identified several positive cases across Santa Cruz County. In each case, students who tested positive or had symptoms were isolated to their homes for 10 days. If the exposure occurred at school and both individuals were wearing masks, parents were given the option to allow students to remain in school as long as students tested twice a week. **In four instances, Public Health identified potential in-school transmission of COVID-19.** These instances appear isolated, and districts have implemented additional mitigation measures in response. Those involved or potentially impacted have been notified, and we are working closely with public health authorities. The information we can share with the wider community is limited to protect student and staff privacy and confidentiality.

The increased number of cases in our schools should not come as a surprise, given the prevalence of cases within our wider community. The vast majority of districts, charter schools, and private

schools have not observed any suspected in-school transmission, and nearly all the COVID-19 cases detected in schools still appear to be acquired at home or in the wider community.

Our districts and charter schools are also working together to significantly expand our ability to quickly and efficiently test students and school staff, and to continue to make vaccination accessible and convenient. Those initiatives include:

- Piloting a program to offer weekly PCR testing for students and staff onsite at nearly every school in Santa Cruz County. This program will operate at no cost to families and schools. It is being piloted at one district starting next week, with the aim of quickly expanding countywide. Parents will be notified by their superintendents what the testing program will look like and when it will begin at their site.
- Launching drive-through testing site for entire school community, symptomatic and asymptomatic, at Cabrillo College in Parking Lot K. Testing is available at this location 3-6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays starting next week. We will soon be expanding the times and dates of availability. To sign up, please [click this link](#).
- Training staff to perform rapid-response antigen testing at school sites. To date, we have trained nearly 200 school staff to conduct antigen testing, and training opportunities are ongoing.
- Offering additional student vaccine clinics in partnership with the Public Health Department of Santa Cruz County on Aug. 30 and Sept. 12. Details are available at [sccoe.link/studentvax](#).

These initiatives represent a monumental effort. They reflect our unwavering commitment to ensuring our classrooms remain open, and our schools and communities are kept safe.

Yours in education and equity,

Eric Gross, Superintendent, Pacific Elementary School District

Mike Heffner, Superintendent, Bonny Doon Union Elementary School District

Tanya Krause, Superintendent, Scotts Valley Unified School District

Daisy Morales, Superintendent, Live Oak School District

Kris Munro, Superintendent, Santa Cruz City Schools

Josh Ripp, Head of School, Ceiba College Prep

Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent, Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Faris Sabbah, County Superintendent of Schools

Chris Schiermeyer, Superintendent, San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District

Michelle Stewart, Superintendent, Happy Valley Elementary School District

Megan Tresham, Superintendent, Mountain Elementary School District

Scott Turnbull, Superintendent, Soquel Union Elementary School District