

June 22, 2020

Dear Live Oak Families and Friends,

Thank you to everyone for their participation in our recent town hall meetings. It was nice to see people and good to listen to your feedback. I especially want to appreciate Pat Mundy for his help in setting up the Zoom link settings and Robert Bunce, Debbie Fox, and Jerusha Ogden for their small group facilitation and collaboration on this event.

In terms of your time and investment in participating in the town hall, we value your contributions and are looking at incorporating your feedback into our planning for the 20/21 school year. I want everyone to know that our faculty commits to continuing their excellent pedagogical instructions based on State guidance for public schools and the principals and values of a Waldorf inspired curriculum. We are so fortunate to have this group of experienced teachers who continue to dedicate their passion for teaching to our children.

I know many of you are curious and wondering about the fall. Please know that we are working under the Sonoma County Department of Health Services guidelines and in conjunction with Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE). Just last Friday, SCOE published their district guidance document for reopening that provides a series of recommendations that are aligned with the current public health order. There was some confusion about this document being made available to the public. To clarify, SCOE requests that this specific document be used as a tool for specific district planning and they are working on a more community friendly document to share in the coming weeks.

Re-opening Info:

Based current recommendations and planning, we are anticipating that reopening school will likely include many safety measures such as mask wearing, social distancing, hand hygiene, monitoring symptoms related to COVID-19, and regular cleaning. All of which are underway with planning and will be determined by our school in accordance with the county guidelines and recommendations.

Although Sonoma County is planning to move to stage 3 of COVID status at the time of this writing, we are one of three counties in the State that is currently on a “watch and concern” list due to the recent spike in COVID numbers. We won't be able to open the campus at all for on-site learning until our county is in stage 3, which is also the basis for the guidance and recommendations document by SCOE. In stage 3 we are expecting that students, teachers and staff can return to school staying 6 feet apart, washing hands several times throughout the day, and implementing extra cleaning protocols. To accommodate a student body our size we may have to divide our classes into two groups (cohort A and B for example). Group A will come to campus for two days, group B will come to campus 2 days, the fifth day will be a short minimum for planning, cleaning, student support, and continuation of distance learning for both groups.

To help us better plan for the 20/21 school year, we would kindly appreciate you taking a minute to complete this [survey](#). It is designed to take less than 10 minutes and your input is critical.

Needless to say, there are a lot of moving parts to our reopening plan and we will need your partnership throughout this process. We will reschedule our town hall for tonight and will work with the Live Oak Foundation to continue sharing information and seek your input throughout the summer. More information on our next town hall will be forthcoming.

Distance Learning Only Option:

Additionally, we learned from our previous survey that about 15% of our families may not feel comfortable about sending students back to Live Oak and would prefer the choice of continuing with distance learning only in the fall. To be clear, distance learning only means that the learning between the student and teacher takes place in two different locations. We are planning to make this option available and are still working out the details. We anticipate holding around 25-30 spots for the distance learning only option. The student will continue to be a part of their specific grade classroom community, but a child enrolled in the distance learning only program would not physically be coming to the school. We are incorporating all of your input and feedback about this Spring into our plan for an excellent distance learning program that includes Waldorf pedagogical practices, small group and one on one check-ins, specific grade level curriculum in reading, writing, spelling, math plus social emotional support.

Face Coverings/Masks:

On Thursday, June 18, Governor Newsom issued a face covering requirement for the State. This is a change from our guidance from the County. In response to this order, our county Superintendent acknowledges that there may be some provisions within this order that will continue to allow for Sonoma County students some flexibility and that efforts are being made to clarify this order and its impact on schools. The current Sonoma county health order provides flexibility for children 12 and under with masks. They are recommended but not required for this age group. As well, children with an underlying health condition are exempt. Masks are most important when other social distancing measures cannot be in place. While students will likely need to wear masks at least some of the time, we recognize the need to provide additional education and social-emotional support to students with these new health guidelines.

PPE and Social Distancing

The County is hoping that the national HEROES Act and state legislature will provide additional funding in the weeks ahead so that schools will have the resources they need to reopen safely. As well, the state has promised to provide personal protective equipment (PPE). Schools will need this additional funding and PPE to reopen safely. As of now, we are expecting to receive cloth and disposable masks, face shields and thermometers from the County sometime after mid-July.

The intent in providing the PPE (personal protective equipment) is to use it as a preventive measure in spreading COVID. Also, I want to acknowledge the reality is that teachers and students will need to interact more closely than six feet at times, and our current guidelines build in flexibility in this regard. It is most important for teachers/students to keep interactions brief when they must be closer than six feet, and to wear a mask.

Some may wonder why we are taking all of these precautions when the data shows that children rarely contract COVID. While children do not appear to be as susceptible to this illness as older individuals, they can spread the illness to older family members or school employees. Sonoma County schools serve nearly 70,000 students and 8,000 school employees and therefore play an important role in helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our overall community. Therefore, it is important that Live Oak also does its part in helping mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19 too.

Finally, as updated from SCOE on June 19, you may have noticed that just recently there was news that Marin County is planning for a full reopening of schools in the fall ([see article here](#)) as they anticipate moving to Stage 4. There have already been many questions about why Sonoma County is not doing the same.

Please note there are significant differences between Marin County and Sonoma County pertaining to COVID-19:

1. Marin County's epidemiology factors are different than Sonoma County's.
2. Sonoma County's COVID-19 caseload is nearly twice that of Marin County (excluding San Quentin).
3. Sonoma County's infection rate is twice that of Marin County.
4. Our student population is more than twice that of Marin County.
5. Marin is in Stage 3 and Sonoma County is in Stage 2 with exemptions.

As a reminder, different counties will be in different stages at different times. Under these conditions, it is necessary to remain cautious and not open ourselves up to increased community spread like other areas around the country have done.

Regardless of future conditions, it is imperative that we keep our enrollment numbers up. For every 10 students we lose, it means a yearly revenue loss of almost \$100,000.00 dollars. Again, please fill out our [survey](#) as your input and information is important in our planning.

Once again, thank you for your continued commitment to our school, community and children. I am continually impressed by the high level of perseverance and conviction with which we are staying the course during these times.

Onwards and upwards,

Best,
Justin