

Letter to the Community

RE: Re-Opening our Schools

From: Inyo County Superintendent of Schools, Barry D. Simpson

As we mark the one-year anniversary of school closures across the country, I would like to take an opportunity to thank every educator in our schools for their work in trying to make the best of a very difficult situation. Faced with a worldwide pandemic, our teachers, administrators and classified staff quickly transitioned to a distance learning platform to maintain educational continuity and student learning. While the vast majority of California schools that shut down in the fall have remained full-time distance learning, our schools began the school year in a hybrid learning model that has allowed students to receive at least part of their education as in-class instruction. We have been able to accomplish what most of California hasn't due to the remarkable efforts of our schools' faculty and staff. Without their support, this never would have been possible.

In addition, our schools have also implemented many protective mitigation measures to make sure our students and the adults on our campuses are safe. Personal Protective Equipment, Social Distancing, Cleaning and Disinfecting Classrooms, Staff Surveillance Testing, Frequent Handwashing, Temperature Screening, Purchasing Air Purifiers for each classroom and most recently with the help of our local Public Health Department vaccination prioritization for every educator. At this point, nearly all teachers who wanted the vaccine have received their second dose!

Again, I am proud of the great work that has occurred in our schools. Yet, we know more and more of our students are not receiving the education they deserve. We are seeing more failing grades than ever before, absenteeism is on the rise, and most importantly the social and emotional well-being of our students is threatened. **For these reasons, I am calling for the full reopening of schools as soon as Inyo County reaches the Red Tier in the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy.**

This decision is being made in collaboration with Inyo County Health Officer Dr. Richardson and the Inyo County HHS Public Health Division. We believe under these special circumstances we need to prioritize the education of our children. With reduced COVID-19 case rates and the slowing of community transmission, we can reopen our schools safely when our county meets the parameters to move into the Red Tier. However, we must continue to faithfully and diligently maintain all of our safety protocols, such as the use of air purifiers for improved ventilation, wearing masks at all times, frequent hand-washing, temperature checks, and having staff and students stay home if they exhibit any symptoms.

Again, I want to commend the incredible work of all of our school district employees and the leadership in each of our districts for their great work. I would also like to thank Inyo County HHS Public Health Division for their tremendous support. The time has come to focus on our students and return to some normalcy. I hope each of our school districts that are not already fully open will work quickly to put plans in place to reopen our schools as soon as possible.

Barry D. Simpson