

News Release

San Diego Unified Transitions to Distance Learning on April 6, Full Implementation Set for April 27

***Move saves the academic year for students in the state's second-largest district
Physical structures to remain closed until health emergency abates
Leaders repeat call for critical state aid to support continued student learning***

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SAN DIEGO - The state's second-largest school district has announced plans to save the remainder of the academic year, while continuing efforts to protect staff, students and their families from the COVID-19 pandemic. San Diego Unified will return to instruction next month to guarantee students an opportunity to successfully complete the current academic year, even as physical school facilities will remain closed until public health officials determine it is safe for students to return to classrooms.

San Diego County and the nation continue to face an unprecedented health crisis due to the spread of COVID-19. The second local death from the virus was reported today.

"Even as our nation faces a health crisis, we can see the size of the education challenge ahead of us," said Board President John Lee Evans. "Students are missing out on valuable learning opportunities. The current situation is unsustainable and demands a solution. The solution we are announcing today allows our students to continue their academic journey without the fear of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic."

President Evans stressed the importance of academic continuity for all students, but especially for graduating seniors and their families. The schedule outlined today by the district will give members of the Class of 2020 the assurance they need that they will graduate, whether or not public health officials approve a return to in-classroom instruction.

The plan outlined by district leaders envisions a gradual return to academic instruction in several phases. Currently, the school district is providing online enrichment activities via the district website and a partnership with public broadcasting. That will change following the end of spring break, on April 6. At that point, teachers will begin receiving training for the move to online instruction, will work remotely with students who are able to participate, and will identify those students who are unable to take part. Work done during this time will not be graded for credit but will contribute towards students' academic progress in the courses they are taking.

"Partnership and engagement between educators, parents and students will be the key to the success of this transition period," said Kisha Borden, President of the San Diego Education Association. "Educators understand any solution will not be a substitute for continued classroom learning, where students can benefit from experienced instruction. For that reason, educators will need to play a major role in managing the transition to distance learning for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis."

“We know our families are eager for their students to continue learning, and our teachers are eager to make that possible,” said Board Vice President Richard Barrera. “The soft launch on April 6 allows teachers and students the opportunity for expanded distance learning, which will grow stronger through the continued collaboration of parents, professional educators and students. We understand how critical these improvements will be, because we know children learn best in a classroom with a qualified educator. This will be a short-term solution until we can return to that best practice.”

A formal return to grading and instruction -- but not a return to the physical school environment - is scheduled for April 27 for the 90 percent of all district students who attend schools on a traditional academic calendar.

As with students on a traditional calendar, the 10 percent of students in year-round schools will experience a soft launch of the new learning environment following spring break, which for these students ends on April 27. There will be a full return to graded instruction in year-round schools on May 11.

“From the start of the public health crisis, we have been clear about two main commitments: our students will have the chance to complete their academic year, and the opportunity to do so will be available to all of our students, no matter what challenges they face,” said Superintendent Cindy Marten.

Marten stressed that much of the plan to provide all students with the technology they will need to succeed remains in development, but the district has a head start as students already have computers available for use in the classroom. Computers, however, cannot be the whole solution given the large number of students without wifi access at home and other students who are homeless.

The integration of both traditional calendar and year-round schools into the return plan is one of the many adaptive challenges schools will face in the weeks ahead, Marten said. San Diego Unified serves a diverse student population, including the second largest number of special education students in the state.

Superintendent Marten joined Superintendent Beutner from Los Angeles Unified yesterday to [call for additional state support](#) “consistent with the size of the challenge ahead, because school systems cannot adequately plan, with one hand tied behind our backs.”

They also urged federal leaders to prioritize schools and students in all national recovery legislation. That call was echoed by the Council of Great City Schools yesterday, who sent a request for additional aid to the [House](#) and [Senate](#).

“It is time to stop focusing on uncertainty and what we do not know. The one thing we know for certain is we have to serve 750,000 students, so let’s get on with that,” said Superintendents Marten and Beutner.

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