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High School district to 'de-densify' campuses in January

By *Sophie Braccini*

The Acalanes Union High School District confirmed that it will reopen classrooms for all students on a hybrid model this January, unless the pandemic worsens. The district will follow the safety protocols mandated by the state and recommended by the district public health department. In order to make sure that the social distancing between students, and between students and staff is maintained, only half of the students will be allowed at any given time on sites - called "de-densifying" the campuses.

John Nickerson, AUHSD superintendent, at the Nov. 4 board meeting detailed the measures that have already been set in place and will intensify as more and more students are invited to return to school. The first is the everyday passive pre-screening protocol that requires everyone to respond to a series of questions each day they plan to go to school. This system that banks on people's sense of responsibility gives a green light or red light depending on the answers to basic health questions such as temperature or exposure to a sick person. Flashing that daily green light on a phone will be required to have access to the high schools.

The superintendent reiterated that masks covering mouth and nose would be required at all times. He detailed how classrooms will be reconfigured for social distancing, how staff would be protected with plexiglass partitions, and how bathrooms had been modified to restrict the number of people inside at one point. Nickerson also described the improvement to the HVAC systems that had been conducted over the summer in the four high school campuses. MERV 13 filtration systems found in hospitals were installed, as well as Needlepoint Bipolar Ionization devices.

Students will be asked to clean their desks and touched surfaces as they move from one classroom to the next. Nickerson explained that additional custodians were being hired to completely sanitize the schools once daily, but that the help of students will be needed during the day.

Each school will have a team in charge of contact tracing. If a student or staff member is found positive for COVID-19, they will be quarantined for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or positive testing. The team will contact the people with whom the infected person spent more than 15 minutes in close contact over a 24-hour period. These people will have to quarantine for 15 days. The identity of the infected person will remain confidential. Board member Dr. Christopher Severson, who works with COVID patients, will be discussing with health authorities ways to refine the tracing protocol for the high school district.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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