

COVID Update and Plans for Reopening

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Dear Colleagues – It is hard to believe that last week marked the one-year anniversary of closing our campuses due to the pandemic. While this decision was made to help slow the spread of the virus and ensure the safety of our employees, students, and communities, the effects have been far-reaching. I want to express my deep appreciation and acknowledge the difficulties this past year has brought to you and your loved ones. Many of you have worked alongside your children, often at the same table. Many of you have experienced loss, illness, and isolation. Even though we may have been going this through together, we weren't really "together." Fortunately, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and I am hopeful for the months to come.

We have our work cut out for us, but vaccines are quickly reducing the spread of COVID-19, and we know where our future challenges lie. Here are some recent daunting statistics:

- Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 enrollments at community colleges have declined by almost 10% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center)
- In our District, Cypress College experienced an enrollment decline of 7% from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021, Fullerton College is down 7.8% in headcount from Spring 2020, and NOCE saw an enrollment decline of 27% during Fall 2020.
- 40% of households report that a prospective community college student is cancelling all plans for community college (Community College Research Center)
- 79% of students surveyed said they were concerned about their mental health during the pandemic (New America/Third Way Higher Ed Tracking Survey)

In addition, the Recovery with Equity Taskforce for CA Governor's Council has stated in a recent report some California industries (tourism, construction, agriculture, manufacturing) may not fully recover to pre-pandemic levels due to increased reliance on technology and automation. These are precisely the industries dominated by our Black and Latinx workers. At NOCCCD, we have lost a tremendous number of students over the past year—especially males of color—and we need to do everything in our power to help them resume their education.

Thankfully, signs are emerging that we can and should begin to re-open our campuses: Orange County has moved into the less-restrictive Red Tier; rapid COVID-19 testing is readily available; and access to vaccinations are growing every day, especially for educators.

With this in mind, we will use the remainder of the spring term to update District and campus plans for returning in larger numbers over the summer and fall. The tentative timeline includes using June and July to phase-in more on-site programs and services with needed employees working on campus and in offices at least one day a week. Our facilities and grounds will be prepared for safe use based on the current State and Federal guidelines. Information about vaccine availability will continue to be shared and all will be encouraged to make arrangements for their shots. These efforts will help prepare all of us for working in the office more regularly. As always, our reopening plans are evolving with the best information we have at the time, but rest assured that we will continue to communicate with you throughout the coming months.

Goal for August 2

By Monday, August 2, our goal is to have all staff currently working remotely to work at least two days a week on-site with staggered hours or days and other science-based protocols to ensure a safe work environment. (Exceptions will be made for those with underlying health conditions who have been approved for FMLA and/or reasonable accommodations). Again, the focus is to serve our students with additional programs, classes, and services on campus, and to encourage them to re-engage with faculty and staff. This also provides the opportunity for staff to get acquainted with the social distancing and protective measures that have been put in place for everyone's safe return.

Fall 2021 Classes

The priorities for on-campus classes will continue to be those that are difficult to teach online including: CTE, Health and Physical Science labs, Performing Arts, and Kinesiology, and such noncredit offerings as DSS, low-level ESL, and High School Diploma. Special attention and priority will also be given to high-demand gateway courses in all disciplines that support students making academic progress. The three campus Presidents are working with their teams to identify and approve in-person courses, and will develop a process for working with faculty to teach on campus. The number and mix of classes for fall will depend on student need, space availability, instructor availability and health conditions in Orange County.

Safety Guidelines and Individual Responsibility

All Safe Reopening Plan guidelines will be posted on the www.nocccd.edu website for ease of access and regular updating—especially since health and safety requirements are changing weekly. All of us are expected to take personal responsibility for our own health and to respect those around us. Those coming on-site should continue to use their campuses' existing wellness check method before reporting to work. At a minimum, all employees and students who come to campus will be required to wear masks or other PPE and to follow best practices for hand-hygiene. The District will continue to provide the necessary equipment and supplies. Assessments of physical space needs including safety screens and air filtration systems and purifiers are on-going and will be conducted by each campus.

Testing

COVID testing has come a long way in the last couple of months. There are numerous free or no-cost options for those looking to get tested including: at-home test kits; drive-thru testing; walk-up testing sites; and community-based clinics, pharmacies, urgent cares and labs testing.

For an up-to-date list of testing options, please visit: <https://occcovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing>

Vaccinations

The availability of approved COVID-19 vaccines is increasing on a daily basis and many of us have been able to get appointments through a number of different sites. At most locations, you will need a California photo ID or driver's license (a District ID is not required), verification of your appointment, and a paystub or business card. Make sure you review the necessary list of items before going to your appointment as requirements vary by location. As stated in the previous memo, vaccinations will not be mandatory until and unless they are legally required but we encourage all employees to be vaccinated.

For an up-to-date list of vaccine distribution channels, please visit: <https://occcovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-vaccine-distribution-channels>

Our campus experiences will be different than they were before the COVID-19 crisis and everyone has a role to play in fostering a safe environment moving forward. One thing that has not changed is the importance of education in creating a more stable and prosperous society. I want to thank all of you for your continued resiliency and resourcefulness during these times. Stay safe as we navigate this together.

Cheryl

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