

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rob Meszaros
Kern County Superintendent of Schools
661-636-4741

No Kern County public school closures announced amid ongoing COVID-19 situation

March 13, 2020 — Administrators from Kern County’s 47 school districts met today to discuss the potential for school closures in our community. Because there are no confirmed COVID-19 cases in our community and no evidence of community-wide transmission — and the fact that schools are an essential service, providing education, meals, security and resources for children and families — there was consensus that Kern County Schools will remain open at this time. The county serves 190,000 students, 73 percent of which receive free and reduced meals and extra support resources. Kern County students do not have access to the same resources as more affluent counties.

“Closing schools would cause huge impacts to the entire community and put our most vulnerable populations at risk, so the decision to close schools should not be taken lightly,” said Kern County Superintendent of Schools Mary C. Barlow. “Our students, families and community are relying on us to stay open as long as it is safely possible in order to receive essential services such as meals, health and mental health services and child care. Thousands of working parents in Kern County may not have provisions for child care and other services for their children outside of school.”

County school districts will continue to operate under guidance released on March 7, 2020 by the California Department of Education and California Department of Public Health. Additionally, after close consultation with Kern County Public Health, because there are no confirmed local cases and no evidence of community-wide transmission, **public schools in Kern County will not be closed at this time**. We are recommending that districts follow the guidelines from California Department of Public Health on social distancing, canceling non-essential meetings and field trips. It is important to differentiate between non-essential gatherings such as field trips and other extra-curricular activities and essential learning and support services that takes place during the school day.

Local educators are hard at work developing contingency plans that will allow for continuity of essential school-related services like meals, childcare and alternate forms of instruction should we find ourselves at a point where school closures are deemed necessary.

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While we have been advised at this time by local public health officials that the risk of COVID-19 remains low for the general public in our community, we acknowledge that there are growing concerns among parents of school-age children. **If parents choose to keep their children home from school during these uncertain times, they should exercise that right and work directly with their students' school to make arrangements.**

In the event there are any public school closures in Kern County, those will be announced by the Kern County Superintendent of Schools office in conjunction with Kern County school districts and Kern County Public Health.

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EDITOR NOTE: This is obviously a very fluid situation and circumstances could change quickly. We will keep everyone updated as we learn more.