

# August 5, 2020: Update from Principal Holding

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Greetings, Judah Families,

I hope you all have been able to make the most of this unusual summer. When we wrapped up in June, my hope for all of you was that you stop and be for a bit, release the daily worry about distance learning, enjoy each other, get off schedule, and just be. If your lives allowed you to do this, wonderful. If they did not, I hope that you have found ways that work for your family to both decompress and reconnect so you are ready to begin the new school year. I know there is a lot of anxiety about beginning the school year via distance learning, especially doing so without a specific end in sight. It's sad. It's scary. It's all kinds of things. But it is NOT a challenge we can't overcome together. Just like in the spring, we will rise to the occasion and make it work for our kids. Except this time, we have three months of experience and time to prepare ourselves and our kids. We will be ready to ensure that each and every one of them has what they need in order to learn and grow this year, distance learning or not.

With just one month left of summer break, I am back at work, preparing our teachers and staff for our return to school via distance learning on September 3. I returned today to dozens of emails inquiring about a number of universal concerns and needs. Rather than try to respond individually to every email in a timely manner while also preparing for our return, I have prepared the below information to address these questions. Please take a few minutes to carefully read each item that pertains to your needs and questions (the blue text are hyperlinks connecting you directly to additional resources). If, after reading, you still have specific questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

As parents, I deeply understand the enormous challenges of distance learning, particularly in a home with two working parents and two school-age children. My commitment to all of you is that in addition to ensuring our planning puts kids first, always, and is in alignment with public health guidelines, district learning guidelines and Judah priorities, I make decisions through a parent lens as well. I cannot begin to know the intricacies of scheduling, working and learning in each of your homes, but I will do my best to mitigate as many complicating factors as I can. But most importantly, I will work to ensure our available resources are allocated based on student needs, not adult wants. This may not always seem fair, but this is equity at its core, a value we are committed to as a staff, community and district.

**Equity & Anti-Racism:** At the end of last year, I asked you to commit as a family to learn and talk about racial injustice in our community and country. A reminder now... preserving our children's innocence does not release us of our responsibility to teach them about injustice and racism and to respect the humanity and dignity of all people.

As you've heard me say, we cannot just be outraged and heartbroken when individual instances happen and our media blows up with coverage of protests and the latest incidents of police brutality against people of color. We cannot look away when media coverage and social media hype ebbs. In order to make our school, community and world a safe, equitable and welcoming space for all children and adults, we must keep at the work of being anti-racist educators, parents and humans. Every single day. Please continue to read, watch, learn, unlearn, talk, and take action together as a family as you forge your own personal paths of becoming anti-racists. While the Judah staff and I remain committed to learning and growing our antiracist teaching practices, this work has to be done in tandem with work at home when parents and children engage with each other. If you haven't yet begun, now is the time! The internet is bursting with resources, find those that work for your family. We'll keep you informed about what we're doing at school.

**Distance Learning:** All SCUSD schools and students are returning to school via Distance Learning this fall. This includes all grade levels, from TK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, general education students and those with IEPs for special education. There are no exceptions. The first day of school is Thursday, September 3. We do not know how long Distance Learning will continue, this depends entirely on [Sacramento County of Education Guidelines](#). Your child's teacher will reach out to you directly prior to September 3 to share their grade level learning plans, schedules and how to get started that first week. We will also hold virtual Back to School Nights (dates TBD). For more information about how SCUSD is returning back to school, please visit our district [Return Together](#) website. Judah's Distance Learning Plan will be developed in alignment with the district's plan, for which some of the details are still being finalized and negotiated with labor partners. I ask that you remain patient and trust that I will provide concrete information as soon as I am able.

**Class Assignments & Lists:** Building of classroom assignments begin at the end of the school year with our grade level teams. This is a careful, thoughtful process in which we consider student academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs as well as strive to create balanced classrooms in which our children learn alongside all kinds of peers. As in years prior, I will not be changing class assignments for any reason, including requests based on distance learning needs such as "learning pods" or teacher preference. As I hope you can imagine, there is no such thing as a "small change" when it comes to class assignments as there is always a ripple effect for other students. I cannot, in good faith, make changes that impact students whose parents are not in a position to create a learning pod or to advocate in this way for their children.

I understand the value in pooling resources and relying on small groups of friends and families to facilitate learning and socialization for our children. If you are considering a "learning pod" with another family please know that rather than making class changes, I will do the following to support these efforts:

- Release class lists as soon as possible. I am waiting for district approval

- Work with grade level teams to align Google Classrooms, instruction of essential standards, assignments, and the content and scheduling of synchronous and asynchronous online learning opportunities

To read more about “learning pods,” both the value and drawbacks, please take a few moments to read these articles:

[Ed Week: Could the “Pandemic Pod” be a Lifeline to Parents or a Threat to Equity?](#)

[New York Times: Pods, Microschools and Tutors? Can Parents Solve the Education Crisis on Their Own?](#)

**Enrollment & Disenrollment:** If you are new to Judah, welcome! When our Office Manager returns to work next week, I will have a better idea of where we stand with enrollment and can answer your specific questions then. For now, if you registered either in our office for kinder this winter or for any grade level through the district enrollment center, your registration was complete when you submitted all required paperwork.

If your child is not returning to Judah this fall, please be sure to let me know. I’ve also received questions about dis-enrolling in order to enroll in programs outside the district, and then re-enroll when the threat of COVID-19 subsides and we are allowed to return to in-person learning. Please know that should you choose to do dis-enroll at any point for any reason, space is not guaranteed upon return.

**Staffing:** As with every school year, changes happen. At the end of last year, we said goodbye to our two of our Kindergarten teachers, Mrs. Dawson and Mrs. Ogden. Mrs. Wong and Mrs. Waldron will now be assuming their roles in Kindergarten. Due to enrollment, we will only have three 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms. Mr. Larson will be joining us as one of our new 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers. He is a current SCUSD teacher that comes to us with 22 years of experience. We also have hired a new RSP teacher, Michael Cabellos. Two of our third grade classrooms will now be located in the new building upon return to school.

**Chromebooks:** Chromebooks will again be available for families who need them. I do not yet have distribution information, but will share when I do.

**Kindergarten:** The kinder team and I will be discussing a virtual meet and greet. We will prepare information to prepare your children and yourself for the first weeks of school and answer all of your questions then. Login information will follow at a later date.

**GATE:** Although we are not a GATE center, we are a GATE cluster-model school and we successfully serve many students who are GATE-identified in all grade levels, differentiated learning opportunities and inquiry. There is no need to enroll elsewhere for your child to receive a rigorous and balanced education in alignment with the needs of gifted children. Please contact the district GATE coordinator Kari Hansen-Smith at [Kari-Hansen-Smith@scusd.edu](mailto:Kari-Hansen-Smith@scusd.edu) for more information.

**SCUSD Learning Options Form:** If you have not yet done so, please complete the [SCUSD Learning Options Form](#). You do NOT need your student's ID number. Simply enter 99999999 if you do not have it on hand. Without office staff yet back on calendar, I am not able to respond to individual requests for student id numbers.

**Communication:** If you haven't yet done so, please check out our school website at <https://www.theodorejudahelementary.org/>

At the top of the page you will see a tab that says "Principal Communication" 2020-2021. This will be one way to ensure you receive timely information throughout the remainder of the summer and into the school year.

I will be in touch as more information becomes available. In the meantime, stay safe, have fun and enjoy the last weeks of this strange summer as best you can!

Dr. Holding