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Date: June 5, 2020

To: Families of Santa Cruz County

Re: **Black Lives Matter Graduation, and Summer Services**

Dear Families of Santa Cruz County,

Santa Cruz County schools join our community in the effort to disrupt systemic racism and the excessive use of police force that disproportionately impacts communities of color. The devastating deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and David McAtee at the hands of police officers in the last ninety days has again brought to light ongoing systemic inequality, oppression, and violence that Black Americans experience each day and the urgency in which it needs to be addressed. These tragic killings have also prompted us all to think deeply about how our identities and actions impact systems of racial discrimination.

It is essential that we continue to prioritize equity in our schools and communities by embracing courageous conversations about race so that we can collectively transform our schools and communities into places of love, safety, accountability, and equitable opportunity. We must come together as a community to deepen our commitment to our shared values of diversity, inclusivity, and justice. Santa Cruz County schools stand in solidarity with our African American community and all communities of color, and are committed to taking concrete steps to crystalize this commitment.

The ongoing pandemic and racial violence we are experiencing in our communities have been deeply painful and significantly affect our community's emotional and mental health. It is important that we show care for one another and seek out support resources for ourselves and others when we need them. Our colleagues at the Los Angeles County Office of Education have gathered a collection of resources to help students process the unsettling emotions that they may be experiencing now, enable the community to deepen their understanding of the manifestations of racism in the United States, and provide positive actions toward justice and reform. The resources are available at this address: <https://www.lacoe.edu/Curriculum-Instruction/Equity-Social-Justice-and-Engagement>. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education is currently partnering with school districts and with our local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to develop additional resources for our schools and our community.

Despite these deeply troubling events weighing on the minds of our students and educational community, Santa Cruz County schools worked hard to host exciting and memorable graduation

ceremonies over the last two weeks to honor the tremendous achievements of our graduates. A number of celebratory commencement activities approved as safe by local public health authorities took place including car parades, drive-up recognitions individualized for small family groups, virtual ceremonies, and pre-recorded video recognitions. We are so proud of our students for the resilience they have demonstrated to maintain their academic progress despite the transition to distance learning, massive upheavals in family life at home, extreme financial hardship, social isolation, and mental health challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. We are also grateful to our dedicated school personnel and parents for helping to make these commencement ceremonies as special as possible for students during this challenging time.

Superintendents of all Santa Cruz County public schools are continuing to work together and within their own districts to plan for the reopening of schools and prepare for a range of possible restrictions schools identified by health authorities. The final plans for the reopening of schools will depend on the direction we receive from the California Department of Public Health, the California Department of Education, and our County Public Health Officer. Some schools will have services available to families through the summer such as virtual summer classes and continued meal programs. Each school will be in contact with families shortly about summer services they will be offering and details about plans to re-open in the fall as more information from public health authorities becomes available.

Additional Information

For the latest updates on the coronavirus pandemic, visit the Centers for Disease Control website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19>. In addition, you can also call 211 or text "coronavirus" to 211211. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education continues to update its web page and resources at www.sccoe.link/coronavirus.

Yours in equity and education,

Laurie Bruton, Superintendent, San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District
Lorie Chamberland, Superintendent, Live Oak School District
Eric Gross, Superintendent, Pacific Elementary School District
Mike Heffner, Superintendent, Bonny Doon Union Elementary School District
Tanya Krause, Superintendent, Scotts Valley Unified School District
Michelle McKinny, Superintendent, Happy Valley Elementary School District
Diane Morgenstern, Superintendent, Mountain Elementary School District
Kris Munro, Superintendent, Santa Cruz City Schools
Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent, Pajaro Valley Unified School District
Faris Sabbah, County Superintendent of Schools
Scott Turnbull, Superintendent, Soquel Union Elementary School District