

- Listen to teachers when coming up with safe re-opening plan

# EDITORIAL

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## LGHS community should have patience to re-open

by Maddie Dewhirst and Sasha Ryu  
National/World Editor and Editor-in-Chief

As the semester comes to a close, there are growing questions regarding if and how Los Gatos High will reopen in the spring. Rather than treating the decision to reopen as a political debate, our community must prioritize a plan rooted in science. While there are ways for LGHS to reopen responsibly, parents and students rushing administrators to expand cohorts or initiate hybrid learning before the district is able to do so safely is deeply irresponsible and ultimately counterproductive.

On Mar. 13, the day school closed, Santa Clara County reported 79 cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases. Nine months later, the virus is worse than ever before. Currently, there are over 40,000 total confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county. On Dec. 7 alone, Santa Clara County reported 1,509 cases.

With cases and death rates on the rise, the risk of an outbreak is especially significant among high school students. This November, University of Utah pediatric infectious disease specialist Dr. Adam Hersh observed: "It's possible that there is even more spread now among high school students than college students." In terms of epidemiology, teenagers are biologically equivalent to adults, and therefore transmit and contract COVID-19 in the same way that adults do. Younger kids appear to exhibit fewer symptoms and lower levels of transmission, making it safer for elementary schoolers to return to school earlier than older students. High school classes are also often composed of students from different grade levels, making it much more difficult to establish and maintain stable cohorts. The risk of an outbreak is also exacerbated by the fact that high schoolers have greater autonomy than younger students. High schoolers have jobs, the ability to drive, and, in general, enjoy more independence to socialize on their own terms.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Del Amigo High School reopened campus to special education cohorts Nov. 17, after their county moved into the purple tier. Within a week, all of the staff members teaching inside of the same classroom, along with most of their students, tested positive for COVID-19. One Del Amigo staffer also shared that the outbreak ultimately led to the infection of her family members, as well as the spouse of one of her coworkers.

According to the Mercury News, "Staff did not follow protocol and instead of sending the [first symptomatic] child to the office to be evaluated by a

nurse, the student was sent home... The school nurse later that day followed up with the student's parent, who reported that the student did not have a high temperature. Therefore, the student was allowed to return to campus."

Del Amigo High is in Contra Costa County, which is home to residents with very similar income rates and ethnic backgrounds as those in Santa Clara County. Given that Santa Clara County and Contra Costa County also currently share similar case and death rates, a premature reopening at LGHS could mirror Del Amigo's outbreak.

Throughout the past nine months, it's become almost impossible to humanize all of the death tallies and infection rates on the news. However, if we insist upon an irresponsible reopening plan, this virus will inevitably become personal. We are doing ourselves and our peers an incredible disservice by writing off the threat of infection as a typical cost/benefit decision. Imagine if even one at-risk student or staff member were to lose their life because of unrealistic reopening expectations. Imagine if that person was your friend, your teacher, your parent, your child. This is not an unlikely hypothetical scenario — this is a very real possibility that we all need to take into consideration when we think about the ways we can start to reopen. Since this March, 512 Santa Clara County residents have died from the coronavirus. It is our responsibility to move forward into the new year in a way that keeps that number from getting any higher.

Teachers make up one of the most at-risk groups in our school community; they're also one of the groups that students and parents have overlooked the most. While some teachers are open to the possibility of returning to campus, under current circumstances, COVID-19 presents too much of a threat for many of our educators to feel comfortable going back to the classroom.

Science instructor **Kate Magary** is one among several LGHS faculty members who lives with an at-risk partner. "It's concerning to me that, in our science classes, we teach the science of epidemiology, but then ask people to come back without testing or tracing being required," Magary stated. "It goes against everything I've taught about science... I would say it's [a reflection of] several structural difficulties [with the county's public health] regula-

tions. That's why, even though I really miss [seeing my students,] until vaccines are widely available, I don't see myself being able to come back."

Aside from the potential public health risk a premature reopening could pose, such a plan is also likely to have a negative impact on returning students' quality of learning. LGHS physics teacher **Sharilyn Anheier** explained: "If we return to in-person teaching [at the beginning of next semester], I [would] not feel at all prepared. [That would] be a lot of work for the teachers unless we were to stick to an online learning model for both in-person and at-home learners, which is not what I think the district or the parents have in mind."

If LGHS were to reopen while the county is still in the purple tier, several at-risk teachers would almost certainly request a leave of absence. As a result, large numbers of students would also be forced to undergo schedule changes during the middle of the school year, making an already challenging learning environment all the more difficult

almost certainly be forced to close within weeks — even days — given the likelihood of community members testing positive.

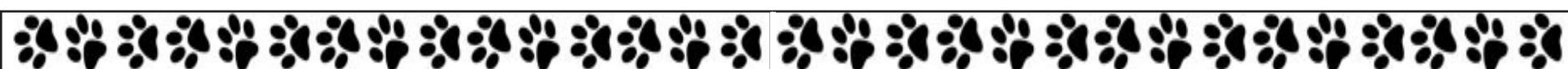
Our school district has been very responsible thus far with its COVID-19 response. It seems safe to predict that LGSUHS will continue to act with the same extreme caution going forward into the second half of the school year. We understand just as much as everyone else that this situation is not ideal and that online classes have significantly impacted the quality of learning, but demanding our administrators ignore the obvious risks is not the answer.

None of this is to say that we cannot reopen until the virus is gone, but health needs to be prioritized, especially that of teachers. The current situation is incredibly nebulous and a multitude of factors need to be considered — sports, hands-on classes and electives, students with special needs — and the last thing this process needs is to be rushed and politicized.

(Sources: NPR, CDC, AP, NCBI, LA Times, Kron4, SCC Gov, NY Times, California All, Salt Lake Tribune, Mercury News)



B. Gibson



### December/January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
13	14 Finals Week (orange day)	15 Finals Week (black day)	16 Finals Week (orange day) Cats Connections webinar	17 End of first semester Finals Week (black day)	18 Teacher work day (no school for students) Last day of Hanukkah	19
20	21 Winter break begins	22	23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26 Kwanzaa
27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	1 New Year's Day	2
3 Winter break ends	4 First day of second semester	5	6 Virtual college visits for seniors	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 Virtual college visits for seniors	14	15	16

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?



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