

Weekly roundup: Tustin Unified partners with OC Rescue Mission, local districts plan for reopening, and more

[Nichole Pichardo](#) September 4, 2020

The Orange County Rescue Mission is gearing up for another school year, albeit with distance learning, thanks to the continued partnership and support of the Tustin Unified School District.

Pre-pandemic, children living at Village of Hope — that's the Rescue Mission's transitional living facility in Orange County — attended school on-campus at Heritage Elementary School. But like most students in Orange County, they are currently receiving online instruction.

Heritage Elementary has been partnering with the Rescue Mission for the last five years. Principal Beth Rabel Blackman said she collaborates daily with the instructional team at the Rescue Mission to provide help with curriculum, technology needs, family resources and more.

"The pandemic has created barriers for so many families in Orange County but for families experiencing homelessness, the additional burden of not being able to go to school in person and trying to navigate distance learning creates significant challenges for students," said Rabel Blackman.



With help from partners like Heritage Elementary, the Rescue Mission has successfully converted rooms into distance-learning classrooms for students. [According to an article in the OC Register](#), 61 resident children, most of whom are elementary age, have Chromebooks and everything else required to keep their schooling going. Additionally, a retired credentialed teacher is on site Monday through Friday to lend a hand with understanding lessons and staying on track.

Since the Village of Hope opened in 2008, thousands of children have attended school in the Tustin Unified School District, according to Jim Palmer, president of the Orange County Rescue Mission.

"Children who have experienced homelessness often face academic challenges," Palmer said. "It is our goal that the homeless children living on our campuses would not only be kept from falling behind in their education, but that they might even thrive and exceed expectations during this unprecedented time."

Here are some additional stories we are following this week:

- The Orange County health officer on Tuesday announced that state officials have reviewed Orange County's COVID-19 data and determined that local schools [will be allowed to reopen for in-person instruction on Tuesday, Sept. 22](#), not Sept. 8 as previously announced.
- Elementary students in the Los Alamitos Unified School District [will be among the first students in Orange County](#) to return to school for in-person instruction on Sept. 8. Utilizing a state waiver, elementary classes will open under the district's hybrid plan, where students will spend 50 percent of their day in classrooms and 50 percent in distance learning.

- The Capistrano Unified Board of Education [voted this week to approve a reopening plan](#) where campuses could gradually reopen for in-person instruction in the coming weeks as part of a phased-in approach.
- Orange County officials said Thursday that once local districts are able to return to in-person instruction on Sept. 22, school districts [will have local power to make determinations](#) as to open or not, and establish their own criteria in terms of managing outbreaks and school safety, the OC Register reported.
- An all-female student activist group in the Capistrano Unified School District, CUSD Against Racism, [seeks changes in Orange County's largest school](#) district by creating a platform around curriculum and discipline reform, equity and student well-being.
- EdSource [provides a quick guide](#) on California's new color-coded, COVID-19 monitoring system and what it means for schools.
- Santa Ana Unified this week [rolled out a new "Wifi on Wheels" program](#) aimed at providing 5G wireless access points to densely populated neighborhoods where students have been struggling to connect to the internet.
- The USDA this week [announced the extension](#) of nationwide summer meal program waivers, allowing districts to continue to offer free meals to students through the end of 2020.
- State public health officials are [reporting that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in steep declines in vaccinations](#) while immunization experts stress the importance of vaccinating a child whether they start school at home or in the classroom, USA Today reported.
- While virtual learning continues, OCDE [offers five best practices to keep virtual classrooms safe](#) from unwanted attendees.
- And finally, a new bill headed to the state legislature could make it possible for a school district, county office of education, or the governing body of a charter school to [retroactively grant a high school diploma to a student](#) who was in their senior year of high school during the 2019–20 school year but did not graduate because of the pandemic.

This is the part where we encourage you to keep up with local education news stories by bookmarking [the OCDE Newsroom](#), [subscribing for emailed updates](#) or following us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).