

**INSIDE**

**Local Rotarians conclude drive-thru meal program**

The Rotary Club of Laguna Sunrise collaborated with other volunteers to prepare and distribute more than 5,400 free meals to local community members in need last month.

See story on Page A3

**Making a (socially distanced) splash**

Last summer began in Elk Grove when large crowds flocked to the grand opening of the long-awaited Elk Grove Aquatics Center in May 2019.

The city of Elk Grove's 76-acre, \$42 million facility will have a quieter and less crowded summer this year. Recreation swimming returned there on July 3, but the crowd capacity is reduced and social distancing is practiced in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

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*Weather*

-  Today: sunny 100°/58°
-  Saturday: 99°/59°
-  Sunday: 103°/62°
-  Monday: 99°/61°
-  Tuesday: 100°/61°
-  Wednesday: 97°/61°
-  Thursday: 95°/60°

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**Elk Grove Unified's school reopening plan introduced**

Trustees, parents divided over district plans

By Cameron Macdonald  
Citizen News Editor

More than 67,000 students will return to school next month in the Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD).

Their parents will face the choices of either keeping them at home to take online classes, or to have them attend class at their campus only a few days a week and continue their classes online when they're off-campus.

The district's 67 campuses have been closed since March 7 after the relatives of a few students tested positive for COVID-19. Elk Grove Unified was one of California's earliest school districts to close all of their schools in response to COVID-19

exposure. Their schools then finished the rest of the 2019-20 school year by remaining at home and "distance learning" or taking online classes until late May.

There are now plans to offer a "transitional" education model in the new school year, which combines in-person learning at school and online learning at home. This measure is designed to practice social distancing at campuses where desks will be placed six feet apart and no more than 20 people will be in a classroom. Students and staff would also be required to wear face coverings if they cannot stay more than six feet apart.

EGUSD staff members presented this hybrid model to the district's school board during their online meeting on June 30.

Superintendent Christopher Hoffman told the trustees about work ahead

for schools this summer. "We have theories about what (the education plan) would look like with social distancing," he said. "We need to be able to test our systems and make sure they work."

Current plans are to have elementary school students on tracks B, C, and D begin their new school year on Aug. 3, while the district's remaining students will start on Aug. 24.

Hoffman warned the school board that Sacramento County's public health services must have adequate COVID-19 testing and contact tracing in place in order for Elk Grove Unified's education plan to be successful.

He noted the district's experience in March when COVID-19 testing was scarce in Sacramento County.

"If we're back to where

See REOPENING on Page 8

**Mayor's associates accused of harassment**

EG school trustee among the accusers

By Lance Armstrong  
Citizen Staff Writer

Elk Grove School Trustee Bobbie Singh-Allen is among three local women who allege that they were harassed by associates or supporters of Elk Grove Mayor Steve Ly.

Ly, who is serving in his second term as mayor, became the first Hmong mayor in the United States when he was first elected to that position in 2016.

Singh-Allen on July 3 posted a statement on her personal Facebook page, in which she claimed that she was harassed by Ly's associates after she was appointed to the Elk Grove school board in 2012. She mentioned that she believes that alleged action occurred because she endorsed Ly's school board

opponent, Jake Rambo. Ly defeated the incumbent Rambo in that year's election.

"Days following the appointment, Steve Ly and his (Hmong) clansmen came after me," she wrote. "They contacted the district to find out how to contest the appointment and petition to have it overturned."

Ly went on to serve with Singh-Allen on the Elk Grove school board until he was elected to the Elk Grove City Council in 2014.

Singh-Allen made her allegation against Ly public through her personal Facebook page on July 3, after she read a June 29 op-ed by Linda Vue, Ly's former, 2016 campaign manager, on the online news site, Elk Grove Tribune.

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**Sac County restaurants ordered to halt indoor dining as COVID-19 cases rise**

By Lance Armstrong  
Citizen Staff Writer

With Sacramento County's recent order prohibiting indoor restaurant dining for at least three weeks, Elk Grove eateries are once again facing challenges.

The county released the order on July 1, after Gov. Gavin Newsom mandated that these businesses halt such dining following a surge in the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). A day earlier, 110 Californians died from this disease, and 5,898 new cases in the state were recorded, Newsom said.

Sacramento County was among 19 counties named by the governor in this mandate, due to its rising number of con-

See RESTAURANTS on Page 7



Photos by Steve Crowley

**The fireworks carry on: City hosts Fourth of July show, without fest**

The city of Elk Grove hosted their annual July 4 fireworks show near the District56 center. Organizers did not announce the location of the fireworks site since they wanted to avoid a large public gathering. Residents were asked to either go outside their homes to watch the show or to view the fireworks on ABC 10. The city canceled the annual Salute to the Red, White, and Blue festival at Elk Grove Regional Park, due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. Inset: Organizers set up the fireworks system at a vacant lot near the city's District56 center on July 4.

**EGUSD board approves budget for 2020-21 school year**

District expects \$64 million in state, federal relief

By Cameron Macdonald  
Citizen News Editor

The Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) board on June 30 adopted their budget plan for their district's 2020-21 fiscal year.

This plan anticipates \$604 million in state revenue funding as well as more than \$64 million in one-time state and federal relief funding to compensate the district for "lost learning" during the COVID-19 pandemic. EGUSD campuses have been closed since early March and schools later

finished the 2019-20 school year by offering online classes through late May.

The district is now preparing for the new school year that begins on Aug. 3 and could have students return to campuses a few days a week, if allowed under Sacramento County public health orders.

"It's been a rollercoaster, but I think we're coming off the ride in a good situation," the district's Chief Financial Officer Shannon Hayes told the school board on June 30.

In May, the district administration warned the school board that Elk Grove Unified faced a potential \$53 million deficit after they reviewed Gov. Gavin

See EGUSD BOARD on Page 4

**Two local supermarket employees test positive for COVID-19**

Leatherby's closes after employee tests positive

By Cameron Macdonald  
Citizen News Editor

Two employees at the Raley's supermarket in Elk Grove tested positive for COVID-19 in late June, a company spokesperson confirmed to the Citizen on July 3.

The first employee last reported to work on June 21, while the other staff member last worked on June 28, said Chelsea Minor, Raley's corporate director of public affairs.

"We do not believe these two cases are related," she added. On July 3, the store was open

for business at 4900 Elk Grove Blvd. in the East Franklin area. Minor said that the store underwent heavy cleaning since June 21.

"We have been through multiple cycles of sanitation of hard surfaces, handles, and common areas of the store," she said. "Team members have all been notified and contract tracing was completed."

The Sacramento County public health staff reported that 342 Elk Grove residents have tested positive for COVID-19 since March, as of July 2. Three of them reportedly died from COVID-19 related complications over the past four months. In Sacramento County, there have been 3,559 confirmed cases and 69 deaths to date. The

See TEST POSITIVE on Page 4



Postage pre-paid

# Reopening

Continued from Page 1

we were in March and we can't test or we can't contact trace, then whatever system we put into place isn't going to work," the superintendent said. "We have to put pressure on our medical partners to be able to test, and be able to test quickly."

## The district's options for parents

At the center of Elk Grove Unified's education plan is the transitional model that aims to bring as many students back to their campuses, as allowed under public health guidelines.

"Bringing everyone back to school at this time simply isn't possible under the current health conditions, and in adhering to the health guidelines," said Mark Cerutti, the district's deputy superintendent of education services and schools.

Of the district staff's options presented to the board, a plan for returning students to school full-time for all five weekdays was not included.

Instead of having all students at their campus on the same day, the district plans to instead organize students into "cohorts" and have each group only attend school at certain times.

One example given by the district staff is that one cohort at an elementary school would attend class two mornings a week and then engage in online learning with their teachers on afternoons and Mondays.

As for middle and high school students, they could have a staggered "4x4 block" system where they would attend school four mornings a week and then have online classes or independent learning with their teachers on afternoons. Mondays would be dedicated to online classes or independent learning with teachers, the district staff presented. This model intends to reduce the student population by half on school days and to keep cohorts isolated.

Another district plan is the "six period plan" for secondary education students, which would have a student cohort attend school twice a week in addition to two days of online learning per week, and then spend Mondays to have either online education, independent study or academic intervention from teachers.

Tami Elmatari, a health services coordinator for Elk Grove Unified, told the school board about the district's plans for addressing a situation where a student or a school employee tests positive for COVID-19.

She presented three scenarios, ranging from "low risk" where an infected person briefly visits a campus, to "high risk" situation where a campus could be closed for a few days of

cleaning and county health investigating if several infected students and employees remain at the school for a long time.

Elmatari said that students will be asked to wash their hands before they enter or exit a classroom if it has a sink, or they will be provided hand sanitizer.

Parents who prefer to not send their children to school will have a few options. They can arrange to have their children stay home and take online classes throughout the school year. Parents can also enroll them in an independent study program via Las Flores High School or the Elk Grove Virtual Academy that serves students in grades K-8.

Middle and high school students can also enroll in Elk Grove Charter School where they can have classroom learning as well as individualized study plans.

## Education plan draws divided opinions

The school board's meeting lasted eight hours and ended in the early morning of July 1. They spent much of that time listening to more than 200 comments submitted by parents, teachers, and other community members who were sharply divided on the proposed "transitional" model and the alternatives of online learning. Each comment was read out loud by a district staff member.

Many parents were concerned about the burdens of working while also taking their children home during short school days and making sure they are taking their online classes at home.

The school board earlier heard protests from parents over the online classes that were given after the campus shutdown this spring. They raised issues over a lack of teacher interaction with students and the challenge of helping their students with their online schoolwork while also dealing with their full-time jobs.

On June 30, parent Lisa McClintock told trustees that the transitional plan's weekly eight hours of classroom instruction is not enough for a quality education. "Two half-days will not provide the quality instruction (my child) needs or deserves," she said. "As a working parent who has been expected to be back full-time since the beginning of May, transportation for a half-day instruction is nearly impossible."

Another parent argued that the transitional model favors households that have one working parent and one stay-at-home parent.

On June 30, the school board heard from parents and teachers who urged them to keep the schools closed and to continue offering online classes only. They said that the health risks are too great for in-person learning at campuses.

Zach Manzanetti, an English teacher at Franklin High School, said that the transitional plan does not protect school staff and students from COVID-19 exposure, and said that the in-person time with students is insufficient.

"It's all but certain there will be an outbreak at school and school will be shut down at least for some time and will return to distance (learning) only," he said. "This plan can only be temporary and puts thousands

at risk and inevitably leads to more people becoming sick and dying."

One parent who did not identify his or herself noted the 70 COVID-related deaths of teachers and school staff in New York City that occurred this spring.

"Which 70 employees are you willing to sacrifice? These are people, not numbers — people who loved their lives," the parent said. "There's no reason to believe that schools in the EGUSD would be affected any differently."

The Elk Grove school board's trustees did not vote on the district's education plan that night; they instead shared their responses. Opinions were mixed — a few favored the hybrid model while others criticized the plan as flawed.

Trustee Tony Perez argued that it's unsafe for campuses to reopen during the pandemic.

"Our number one job is the health and safety of our students and staff," he said. "Now we want to let our students back in the classrooms and the community

spread (of COVID-19)."

Trustee Carmine Forcina has been an outspoken proponent of returning students to school full-time. Forcina argued that the district staff's process of creating an education plan was not inclusive of all stakeholders. He said the message was clear from hundreds of parents and teachers who communicated with him.

"(They) overwhelmingly say they have not been heard and they want a full return to school," he said.

The trustee mentioned that he submitted 29 questions to the district staff about the education plan and were not answered before the June 30 school board meeting.

Forcina also stated that the transitional plan will be burdensome for many parents.

"What about parents who scramble to meet childcare, especially low-income parents who will undoubtedly leave children at home?" he said. "The most vulnerable will have the most to lose."

In contrast, a few trustees leaned in favor of the transitional education

plan.

"I feel that the transitional plan has a lot of flexibility to it, it's certainly not etched in stone, we're working on it every day," Trustee Chet Madison said. "Tomorrow, we can wake up and something drastic can happen — maybe we might not even open up school again."

Trustee Bobbie Singh-Allen said that the transitional model is the "responsible" choice. "We do have to get our kids back in school but we have to do it in a thoughtful and a methodical way," she said.

Singh-Allen mentioned a survey of teachers represented by the Elk Grove Education Association and noted that 63% of them preferred the transitional model.

Rick Stancil, the president of the Elk Grove Education Association, could not be reached for comment, as of press time.

As part of the district's new education plan, schools will spend July engaged in tasks such as creating student schedules, refining operational plans, and communicating with par-

ents about the new school system. The district staff is still negotiating agreements with the labor organizations that represent Elk Grove Unified employees.

Near end of the board meeting, Perez remained skeptical that it was safe enough for campuses to reopen. Hoffman then spoke about the uncertain future ahead for Elk Grove Unified during the unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed that the district still needs to be prepared with a plan to return students to school.

"I can't tell you what's going to be in place a month from now, but at some point we have to be ready to do a transitional model," the superintendent told Perez. "It could be Aug. 3 when the transitional model goes into place; it could be Nov. 1 — I can't predict that right now, but we have to build a plan and we have to be ready."

The Elk Grove school board's next meeting will be held online at 6 p.m. on July 21. This session can be viewed by visiting their district's website, www. EGUSD.net.

# Harassment

Continued from Page 1

In that piece, Vue claimed that after she expressed criticism of the mayor through her public Facebook posts, she was harassed by Ly through his associates who are part of the Hmong family clan system.

Vue, who is Hmong, noted that a Hmong clan is a family, social structure that is "called upon from time to time to act as a communal court to settle various community and family issues." There are 18 such family clans in Hmong society.

"It is a failed system that has been heavily criticized for its role in gender-based violence in the Hmong community and Ly used that to his advantage," she stated.

Vue alleged that her harassment came after she claimed that Ly prematurely implied on his Facebook page that Black Lives Matter protesters set fire to a south Sacramento business that was owned by his friend. It was later revealed that the fire was not associated with the protesters, Vue noted.

Ly deleted his post and later denied allegations through his own op-ed piece that was published in the Tribune on June 30.

After posting Vue's op-ed, Dr. Jacqueline "Jax" Cheung, owner and editor-in-chief of the Tribune, said that she received telephone threats against her family from strangers.

Cheung said that she has twice been harassed since running Vue's op-ed in the Tribune. She also told the Citizen that she was threatened during the first call after refusing to remove Vue's op-ed.

"(The caller said, 'If you don't (remove it, expletive) is going to go down with you and your daughter,'" she said. "And I said, 'Is that a threat?' He said, 'It's a fact.' And I said, 'OK, we're done here. I will be reporting this to the police.'"

Jason Jimenez, public information officer of the Elk Grove Police Department, confirmed that the

police report was filed.

Singh-Allen expressed her support for Vue and Cheung on her personal Facebook page on June 30.

"As a woman, a mother and an elected leader, I am disgusted that two women are being subjected to bullying, harassment, and threats of physical harm because one of them spoke out against the mayor of Elk Grove and the other dared to publish the op-ed online," she wrote.

In the same statement, Singh-Allen referred to the Hmong family clan system as a "controlling and intimidating system used to attack and silence these women."

Singh-Allen told the Citizen that Vue and Cheung's claims reminded her of being harassed in 2012.

"(Ly) and his people did this to me in the same way they did it to Jax and in the same way they did it to Linda Vue," she said. "So, this man not only has a problem with women, but using people to come and silence women from speaking up and speaking out."

"I specifically supported everyone who ran against him because I don't support him. I don't support who he is."

Vue, who said that she began being harassed by "online trolls" last month, claimed that Ly does "not need to do much for actions to be taken" against others.

"Steve holds power and privilege in the Hmong community, so he knew that he only needed to express his grievances regarding my post (to) retain a reaction that would benefit (him)," she said.

With the mayoral election only four months away, Vue said that there is no political motive in her comments.

"That's not the case," she said. "This whole thing that set off everything in motion came from Steve's callous, yet ignorant post on his Facebook (page)," she said.

## Local elected officials condemn alleged acts

Media coverage of Vue's allegations against Ly prompted a few local elected officials to speak out.

Elk Grove School Trustee Nancy Chaires Espinoza, who ran against Ly for the Elk Grove City Council's District 4 seat in 2014, told the Citizen that she believes the allegations against the mayor.

"When I heard the most recent allegations, I immediately believed them, even though I have no connection to the most recent victims," she said. "The behaviors described are exactly what I've experienced with him. The pettiness, the retaliation and the denial of responsibility. I

especially recognized that overly-aggressive manner of attack he reserves for the women he perceives as a threat."

Cosumnes Community Services District (CSD) Director Jaclyn Moreno called upon Ly to "dismantle the patriarchy" in the Hmong clan system. He was one of the earliest elected officials to support her when she ran for the CSD board in 2018.

"Patriarchy isn't something that's unique to the clan system," Moreno said. "We have the patriarchy that exists within our political system, that exists within our workplace, that exists within every facet of society that women are dealing with," she said.

"As a Hmong elected leader, (Ly) can contribute as an ally to women to help dismantle the patriarchy that exists within the system."

Former Elk Grove Mayor Gary Davis commented on his personal Facebook page that he was "disturbed" about the accusations against Ly.

In that post, he shared what he loves about Elk Grove, but concluded that "we can do better."

Davis declined to comment for this story.

## Mayor responds to allegations

Ly told the Citizen this week that he did not order Hmong clan system members to harass or threaten anyone.

"There is a chair of the clan system in the Sacramento area," he said. "He wasn't contacted (or) asked by me or anyone in my campaign to intervene in this."

The mayor added that he cannot control "whether people have an interest to want to go out and defend the person that they support."

Ly also denied Singh-Allen's allegation that he attempted to overturn her school board appointment.

"I don't know what she's referring to," he said. "During that time, yes, I was present, because I was already running for school board. The contention during that time was whether the school board should be appointing school board members or it should go to the voters."

"Whoever it was that was competing against her brought that as an issue. So, I think that (Singh-Allen) is making the association that I must be responsible for that, because I was in the audience at the school board meeting."

Regarding his Facebook post about the south Sacramento fire, Ly stated that it was misunderstood.

"I made no indication of it referring to the peaceful

demonstrations of Black Lives Matters," he said. "In retrospect, it was a bad post and I took it down, and I said, 'This conversation is going in the wrong direction.'"

"When I took it down, Linda Vue took the opportunity to spin the narrative to say that my position was to accuse the protesters of burning this particular business. That now morphed into what we see now."

Ly told the Citizen that many people are confused about the Hmong clan system, which he referred to as the "equivalent of the Native American peace circle — (the) restorative justice."

"(Some people) think that this clan system is a part of this mafia that is used to suppress other individuals," he said. "The Hmong community is really hurt as a result of this."

The mayor expressed disappointment with Singh-Allen and Moreno's social media comments on this issue.

"The Elk Grove School District has the highest Hmong student population in the county, and it just shocks me that a school board member would be so callous to label the Hmong familial clan system and refer to them as 'clansmen,'" he said about Singh-Allen.

"In addition to that, I think it's irresponsible for Jaclyn Moreno to make a statement where she doesn't understand what the clan system is. It is multiple levels and it is difficult to explain. Jaclyn Moreno has failed in her efforts to understand what the clan system is."

"In her post, she is asking that I denounce the clan system. I'm going to denounce my family? She doesn't understand that."

Ly said that the Hmong clan system is not perfect.

"We know that the patriarchy in the clan system is there," he said. "What we are working on is changing all of that. Right now, we have Hmong women that are doctors and lawyers and politicians. This is a changing clan system."

Ly noted that he is interested in having this issue resolved.

"What's important now is to set this aside and resolve it and finding out who's responsible and getting on with the campaign," he said. "I understand that this is during the campaign season. That does raise some serious questions for me, as well."

"The most important part of this is I want to get back to doing what's good for Elk Grove and pay attention to the things that we can do to bring good things to Elk Grove."



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