

# SANTA MARIA TIMES

## Copenhagen closure extended

Solvang City Council votes to close drive through Oct. 31, 2021. **CENTRAL COAST, A3**



## Locals play in All-American Games

Softball standouts head to Oklahoma City for prestigious competition. **SPORTS, B1**



**HAZY SUN 75 • 55** FORECAST, B6 | **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2020** | [santamariatimes.com](http://santamariatimes.com)

### BACK TO SCHOOL



LAURA PLACE PHOTOS, STAFF

Valley Christian Academy second-grade teacher Mary Cover grades assignments on Tuesday in a classroom prepared to receive students for in-person learning this week. The school received state approval on Monday to reopen the campus for K-6 students.

## Valley Christian, St. Mary's students cleared to return

Santa Maria schools get state approval to bring back grades K-6

LAURA PLACE  
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Two more private schools in the Santa Maria Valley will bring elementary students back for in-person learning over the next week, after receiving state approval of reopening waivers on Monday.

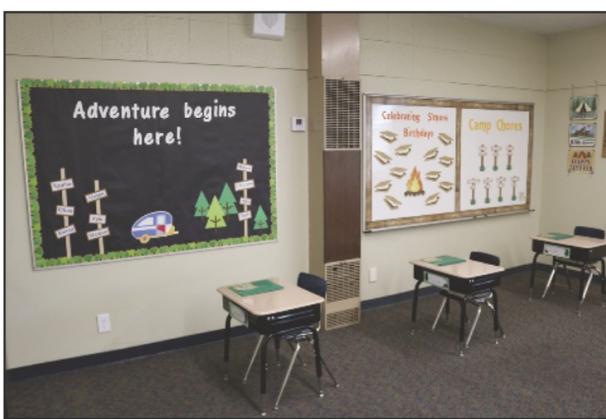
Valley Christian Academy on Santa Maria Way and St. Mary of the Assumption School on East Cypress Street both will be permitted to bring back students in grades K-6 for in-person learning that will involve cohorts and social distancing. Students also will have the option to continue distance learning.

Twenty-three schools in Santa Barbara County have applied for state waivers, with 14 approved thus far. Waivers are first reviewed by the county Public Health Department, then passed on to the California Department of Public Health for final approval.

Although Santa Barbara County remains in the most restrictive reopening tier, the waiver is open to all elementary schools in the state.

Valley Christian Academy will begin phasing in students in grades 1-3 on Thursday, followed by grades 4-6 on Friday, with St. Mary of the Assumption School waiting to reopen until Sept. 23, officials from both schools said.

According to Valley Christian Principal Christopher Maples, the K-12 school has been able to host small groups of kindergartners on



Small desks are spaced out evenly in a second-grade classroom at Valley Christian Academy, where K-6 students will be permitted to return for in-person learning this week following approval from the state.

campus since last week under state child care guidelines, helping staff get a jump-start on keeping cohorts of students separate from one another.

"That's been good practice for us with the cohorts, because that's the biggest logistical issue for us — keeping our cohorts separate at recess and at lunch. That's really helped us prepare for later this week when we have the older kids back," Maples said.

With only 190 students between grades K-6, class sizes can stay small, Maples said. In a second-grade classroom taught by first-year teacher Mary Cover, 10 small desks were spaced evenly throughout the room in preparation for students' return on Thursday.

At St. Mary of the Assumption School, staff experienced some whiplash leading up to their waiver approval. Last week, the school was

incorrectly told by county officials that their waiver had been approved on Thursday and they were permitted to reopen, leading administrators to make reopening plans they then had to retract, according to a letter sent to school parents.

Once the waiver was officially approved by the state on Monday, Principal Michelle Cox said they decided to wait until next week to give families time to plan.

"It's a new process for everyone. There are mistakes along the way," she said.

The Catholic K-8 school is anticipating the return of about 75% of students for in-person learning, with the rest continuing in a distance model, according to Cox. Teachers will continue to provide both forms of instruction to serve both the "roomers" and the "zoomers."

"Our focus is on in-person instruction with a live feed for our at-

home zoomers so they can access all the instruction taking place," Cox said.

According to St. Mary's COVID-19 reopening plan, which schools are required to share on their websites, health and safety procedures for in-person learning will include Plexiglas sneeze guards on each desk, daily cleaning of high-touch surfaces and student temperature checks each day.

Similar safeguards will be in place at Valley Christian, whose plan describes one-way hallways marked with signage, daily professional cleaning, and required daily screenings by families before children are sent to school, in addition to school-provided temperature checks.

Masks or other face coverings will be required for all students at St. Mary, while at Valley Christian they will only be required for students in third grade and above.

Classes at St. Mary of the Assumption also will be slightly larger, with up to 24 students allowed per classroom, according to Cox.

Down the road from Valley Christian, elementary students at nearby Pacific Christian School began to return to campus this week after in-person instruction was granted by the state.

Waivers also have been approved for Santa Ynez Valley Christian Academy, Santa Ynez Valley Family School and several schools in the Santa Barbara area.

Other local schools awaiting approval include St. Louis de Montfort in Santa Maria, Santa Ynez Valley Charter School and La Purissima Concepción Catholic School in Lompoc.

## Israel signs pacts with 2 Arab states: A 'new' Mideast?

DEB RIECHMANN, MATTHEW LEE  
AND JONATHAN LEMIRE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Israel on Tuesday signed historic diplomatic pacts with two Gulf Arab states at a White House ceremony that President Donald Trump declared will mark the "dawn of a new Middle East," casting himself as an international peacemaker at the height of his reelection campaign.

The bilateral agreements formalize the normalization of Israel's already thawing relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in line with their common opposition to Iran. But the agreements do not address the decades-long conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, who view the pacts as a stab in the back from their fellow Arabs and a betrayal of their cause for a Palestinian state.

Hundreds of people massed on the sun-washed South Lawn to witness the signing of agreements in a festive atmosphere little marked by the coronavirus pandemic. Attendees did not practice social distancing and most guests didn't wear masks.

"We're here this afternoon to change the course of history," Trump said from a balcony overlooking the South Lawn. "After decades of division and conflict, we mark the dawn of a new Middle East."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the day "is a pivot of history. It heralds a new dawn of peace."

Neither Netanyahu nor Trump mentioned the Palestinians in their remarks, but both the UAE and Bahraini foreign ministers spoke of the importance of creating a Palestinian state.

Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan,

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## Seeping under doors, bad air from West's fires won't ease up

SARA CLINE AND GILLIAN FLACCUS  
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Putrid, dangerous air spewing from massive wildfires on the West Coast is seeping into homes and businesses, sneaking into cars through air conditioning vents and keeping people already shut away by the coronavirus pandemic from enjoying even a walk outside or trip to the park.

People in Oregon, Washington state and California have been struggling for a week or longer under some of the most unhealthy air on the planet. Relief from the acrid yellowish-green smog may not come for days or weeks, scientists and forecasters said.

And with wildfires getting larger and more destructive because of climate change and more people living closer to areas that burn, it's likely smoke will shroud the sky more often in the future.

"I don't think that we should be outside, but at the same time, we've been cooped up in the house already for months, so it's kind of hard to dictate what's good and what's bad. I mean, we shouldn't be outside period," Portland resident Issa Ubidia-Luckett said as she grabbed food Monday.

The hazy, gunk-filled air closed

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## County shows improvement in efforts to control COVID-19

But case rate keeps county in 'purple' tier another week

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Santa Barbara County will remain in the state's purple, or "wide-spread," tier for risk of COVID-19 transmission at least another week after the rate of new cases failed to drop into the red zone for "substantial" risk.

Although the percentage of positive test results — the other metric being monitored by the state — has dropped into the orange, or "moderate," tier, the new case rate still exceeds the threshold set by the state for moving the county into the red, according to a report delivered Tuesday to the Board of Supervisors.

Van Do-Reynoso, director of the County Health Department, told supervisors both the county's unadjusted and adjusted new COVID-19 case rates are 9.1 per

100,000 of population, while the state's threshold for moving into the red is 4 to 7 new cases per 100,000.

The county's percentage of positive COVID-19 tests stands at 4.8%. The threshold for the orange tier is 2% to 4.9%, while for the yellow, or "minimal," tier it is less than 2%.

The metrics, based on a seven-day average with a seven-day lag, are analyzed every Tuesday to determine the county's tier in the state's Blueprint for a Safer Economy.

But even when the county does hit the threshold for the red tier in both metrics, it will have to remain there for two weeks before it's officially moved to red and any change takes place in the business sectors, Do-Reynoso said.

The report on the status of the COVID-19 response in the county included two new graphs based on the state's current blueprint that clearly showed the trend of both metrics stretching back to Feb. 29

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