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Two students die, COVID rises in SSUSD

By John V. Ciani
For the Daily Independent

Two students passed away recently, and the Sierra Sands Unified School District is seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases.

Reporting to the Board of Education last week, Superintendent Dr. Dave Ostash said the

two, a senior from Mesquite High School and a junior from Burroughs High School, passed away the previous weekend.

"We extend our deepest heartfelt sympathy and condolences to their families, classmates, teachers, and the community," he said. "There is nothing more tragic than the loss of life in our school com-

munity."

He said the district also made grief counselors and other services available to the students and staff at both schools.

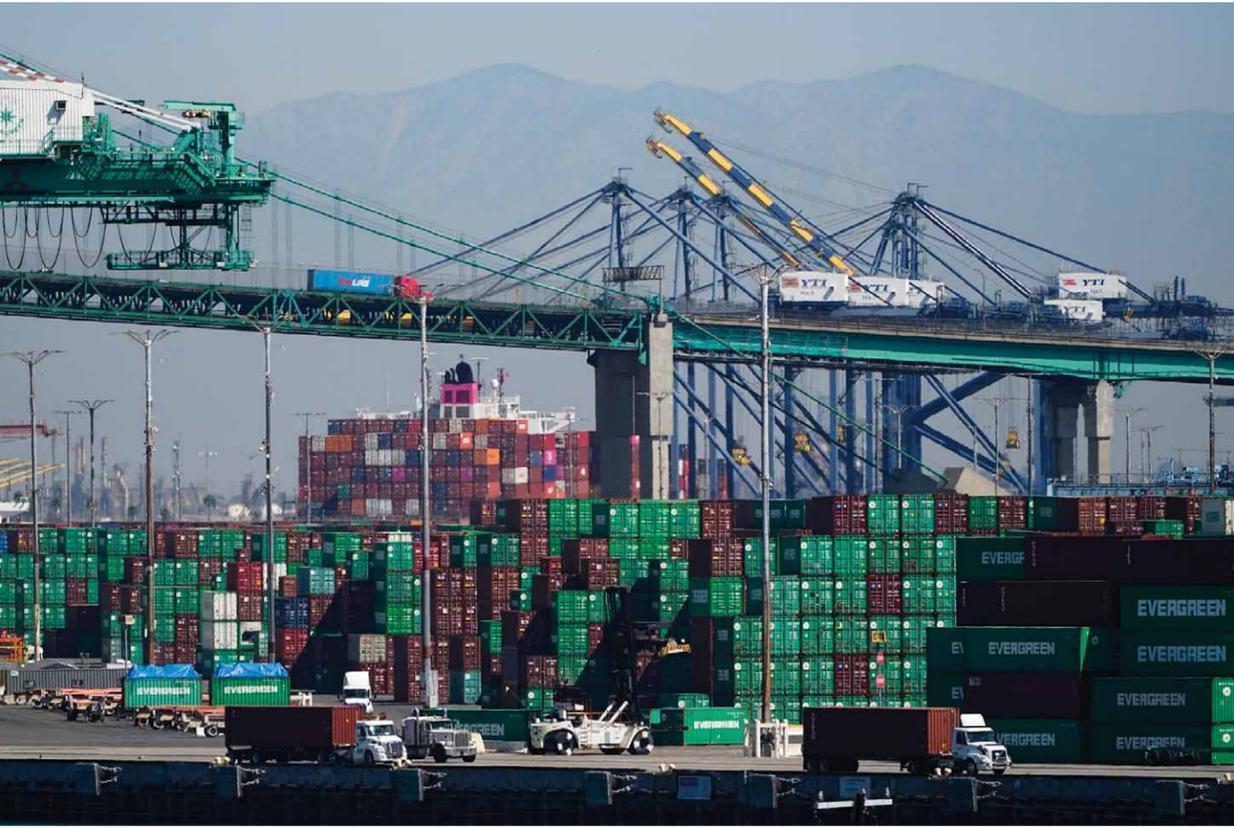
Ostash also reported 10 staff members tested positive for COVID last month, and 23 more tested positive this month for a total of 33 this year.

He said 239 students have

been or were on quarantine study contracts last month, and 519 more were added this month for a total of 758 this year.

Ostash told the board 21 students tested positive at site for contact tracing last month, and 42 more tested positive this month for a total of 63 this year.

"This represents tremendous extra work for our faculty, and that's a huge challenge for us," he said. "We believe the extra work is required because that is really what we have control over - managing the contact tracing and getting students in a position where they are least likely to transmit COVID."



Containers are stacked at the Port of Los Angeles in Los Angeles on Oct. 1, 2021. The backlog is driving delays in arrival of medical equipment.
AP PHOTO/JAE C. HONG

Supply chain woes trigger shortages of medical devices

By Kristen Hwang
CalMatters

When Henry Genung was four months old, doctors cut a hole in his windpipe and inserted a tube to help him breathe. Born with a rare genetic mutation that blocked his upper airway, Henry, who is now 18 months old, will need the tube for several more years.

For three months, Henry hasn't had a new rubber tracheostomy tube even though doctors recommend that they be replaced weekly to reduce the risk of infection. Instead, Henry's parents have resorted to soaking his used tubes in hydrogen peroxide and boiling them for five minutes. Their medical supplier and doctor's office told them they don't know how soon new supplies will be available.

"It's an ongoing saga of delayed shipments," said Myah Genung, Henry's mother, who lives in Los Angeles with her husband Dillon and son.

With upwards of 80 container ships languishing off the coast of Southern California, patients and medical suppliers are worried that stories like Genung's will become increasingly common.

The logjam at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach - which handle 40% of all waterbound imports to the U.S. - has triggered shortages of everything from computer chips to



A health care worker tends to a COVID-19 patient in the intensive care unit at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose on Jan. 13, 2021. Hospitals worry that medical supplies are held up in the port traffic jams, spurring shortages and delays in shipments.
AP PHOTO/JEFF CHIU

paper products to kitchen appliances, and drawn the attention of President Joe Biden. But, while many people are worrying about delayed Christmas gifts, many Californians are grappling with shortages of lifesaving medical supplies.

California hospitals say medical supplies are more difficult to acquire now or are taking much longer to be

delivered. Although the Hospital Association of Southern California says no one has reported any acute shortages yet, administrators are concerned about the delayed shipments that are anchored off the coast.

Experts say the shortages and inflation will drive health care costs

See MEDICAL, A3

Cerro Coso welcomes nursing professor Lisa Balk

News release

Cerro Coso Community College welcomes new Associate Professor of Nursing Lisa Balk to the college.

Born in Maryland, Balk, a military wife, has lived the military life and spent time in San Diego, Rhode Island, and Maryland when her husband was active-duty Navy.

She moved to Ridgecrest in 2016 when her husband took a job at China Lake.

Balk has a real heart for animals and worked many years as a veterinary assistant while pursuing a career in nursing.

"I have had a wide variety of nursing positions but always loved the teaching aspects of each," she said. "In Maryland I taught in an Associate of Nursing program at the community college where I took my prerequisites for my bachelor's degree."

Balk and her husband have a son that lives and works in Ridgecrest and a daughter in the Los Angeles area training horses. She has two rescue cats, enjoys working with the Guide Dogs for the Blind, and is currently raising her fourth puppy. He accompanies her to work at the college some days, enjoying all that the campus has to offer.

Balk holds a bachelor's in nursing from Stevenson University, and a Master of Science in health science, leadership and management with an education focus from the University of Maryland School of Nursing. Welcome Lisa!

Cerro Coso's Vocational Nursing Program is an intensive program totaling 1,662 hours and prepares students to take the licensure examination provided by the National Council of State Board of Nursing (NCLEX-PN). Approved by the Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians, the college offers two Vocational Nursing pathways: a Certificate of Achievement and an Associate of Science Degree.

Nurses are in high demand and job opportunities for nurses vary widely.



Lisa Balk

See BALK, A5

SSUSD OKs contract for earthquake repair inspections

By John V. Ciani
For the Daily Independent

The Sierra Sands Unified School Board of Education, at its meeting last week, approved an agreement with BSK for inspection services associated with earth-

quake repairs to the Sierra Vista Education Center.

District Director of Construction Randy Coit said the board approved an agreement with several companies April 15 to perform earthquake repairs to

the Sierra Vista Education Center exterior canopy.

"Construction began on this project in May 2021," he said. "For some portion of this work, it was necessary to contract for inspection services. The orig-

inal estimate associated with these services was \$9,984 therefore, board approval was not required to proceed with the services."

He said during repairs, the Kern County Planning Department increased the scope of

work to require full-time inspection services for a portion of the project.

"This increased the total cost of the inspection services such that board approval is now required," said Coit.

The cost for this

amendment is \$13,616.26.

It is anticipated that the California Office of Emergency Services will reimburse 75 percent of this funding, and the remaining 25 percent will come from the district's Capital Facilities Fund.