

**SAFELY TOSSING THE TREE »** Many places to recycle holiday greenery across Sonoma County as year comes to close. **A3**



**BEST AND WORST OF 2020 »** Niners had excellence to go with disappointment during year of pandemic. **B5**

# The Press Democrat

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## \$2B sought to reopen schools

**PANDEMIC »** Newsom would give elementary staff priority for vaccine

By **VALERIE STRAUSS**  
WASHINGTON POST

California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Wednesday proposed spending \$2 billion to incentivize local school districts to reopen elementary schools starting in February to help the youngest and neediest students at a time when the coronavirus pandemic is still raging in parts

of the state. Newsom's plan — which includes a provision that would prioritize school staff for coronavirus vaccinations — appears to be the first offered by any governor to use large-scale funding to help reopen schools, though the state legislature must approve it first. The governor said he will ask legislators for the money when their next session opens in January. California's effort will be in line with President-elect Joe Biden's declaration that he wants to help districts reopen

most schools in the first 100 days of his presidency, which starts on Jan. 20. But it is not yet clear how teachers and their unions will react to the plan in California, where most school districts remain closed because of high coronavirus infection rates. Many educators have been reluctant to return to schools so far, fearful that there have not been sufficient protective measures taken to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks. The Los Angeles Times reported that state officials plan to make local reopen-

ings contingent on agreements made between labor unions and districts. And it is not clear how many districts will qualify for funding to reopen. Schools that would be eligible to reopen, according to Newsom's plan, must be in counties with a seven-day average coronavirus positivity rate of fewer than 28 cases per 100,000 people. Right now, most urban areas in the state have much higher rates of transmission. "As a father of four, I know firsthand what parents, educa-

tors and pediatricians continue to say: in-person is the best setting to meet not only the learning needs, but the mental health and social-emotional needs of our kids," Newsom said in a statement. The plan envisions first bringing back students from preschool to Grade 2 to return to campuses in February, along with students who are considered the most vulnerable and have special needs. Other grade levels would return on a

TURN TO SCHOOLS » PAGE A2

## Officials focus on wedding scofflaws

*To date, no citations have been issued despite tips of illicit gatherings*

By **WILL SCHMITT**  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Two Sonoma County supervisors Wednesday criticized large weddings held during the pandemic and again called for stronger enforcement of public health orders while lamenting obstacles they say hamper county officials' ability to impose sanctions on illicit nuptials. Venues that repeatedly host weddings in violation of COVID-19 health orders should be fined, said Lynda Hopkins, incoming chair of the Board of Supervisors. The county will examine the potential for future weddings at a collection of restaurants, inns and event venues owned by a Sonoma company that reportedly hosted several weddings over the summer, a county spokeswoman said Wednesday. The call to step up enforcement of Sonoma County's wedding industry followed a report this month by the San Francisco Chronicle that the county issued no fines or citations — and only three warnings — despite receiving 15 complaints about weddings in unincorporated parts of the county, including one that reportedly drew as many as 100 guests. Weddings with more than 12 people have been prohibited in Sonoma County since June, part of a series of restrictions on public gatherings where COVID-19 can spread. Marriage ceremonies must be held outdoors, while receptions cannot be held anywhere in the state. The county, for months ranked the worst in the Bay Area at containing the spread of the coronavirus, has focused on voluntary compliance with health orders and on educating violators before taking stricter action. Verifying allegations after an event has taken place is more difficult than taking preemptive action against a gathering planned in the future, county officials said. And people socializing in larger gatherings who come down with COVID-19 may be reticent to admit their actions. "They know that was wrong, and they're probably worried about getting people in trouble," Hopkins said.

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## WINTER SUNSET IN SONOMA COUNTY

PHOTO BY KENT PORTER THE PRESS DEMOCRAT



Visitors take in the sunset at Bodega Head on Tuesday. Showers Wednesday night were forecast to drop less than 0.1 inch of rain across most of Sonoma County by Thursday morning, according to the National Weather Service. The modest precipitation was not expected to be intense enough to cause debris flows or mudslides in areas charred by a series of destructive wildfires this year.

Visibility for the final sunset of the year Thursday is expected to be clear. "It should be a pretty good-looking sunset," said weather service meteorologist Ryan Walbrun. "This current front should be well out of the region by then." The weather service is also monitoring an incoming weather pattern that could bring a series of storms to the region starting as early as this weekend.



Sundari Mase

### SONOMA COUNTY

## Renewal of health order likely

*Stay-home rules likely to be extended past Jan. 9 as new cases still high*

By **PHIL BARBER**  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Sonoma County is unlikely to end its current stay-at-home order when it is set to expire the night of Jan. 9, Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase said during her final public briefing of 2020. As coronavirus spreads locally at the highest rate of the pandemic while parts of the state are struggling to provide enough hospital beds for patients, it's no shock that Mase is less than optimistic about reopening in a week and a half. "I don't predict that," she said Wednesday. "Because we've already had a wave of gatherings for Thanksgiving that led to cases. We'll probably see an increase from Christmas as well, traveling as well as gatherings. And New Year's is coming as well. Jan. 9 is really right around the corner for us. So I don't anticipate that we'll be out of the state order on Jan. 9." That order, announced by California Gov. Gavin Newsom Dec. 3, ties the ability to gather in backyards and eat outdoors at restaurants to a region's ICU bed availability. On Dec. 10, Sonoma and 10 other Bay Area counties preemptively adopted a collective stay-at-home order as the region approached the 15% availability threshold established by Newsom. It's hard to gain an accurate read on ICU capacity, a measure that can be fluid based on staffing and contingency plans. But the most up-to-date data from the California Department of Public Health shows Sonoma County with 20 available staffed ICU beds as of Tuesday. The county is licensed for 77 ICU beds, though that number can be lower based on available staffing. Twenty available beds would put local hospitals above the 15% mark. But Mase said the overall Bay Area availability

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**NO VOTE ON \$2,000:** McConnell says he won't be 'bullied' by Trump, Democrats or Republicans to pass additional pandemic relief / **B1**



**SANTA ROSA**  
High **60**, Low **33**  
THE WEATHER, **B12**



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