

State of California

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR



January 19, 2021

To: Local Health Officers and County Superintendents
From: Safe Schools for All Team

RE: Safe Schools for All Plan and Key Near-Term Issues Regarding School Reopenings

MARK A. GHALY MD, MPH
SECRETARY

Dear Local Health Officer and County Superintendents of Schools,

Aging
Child Support Services
Community Services and Development
Developmental Services
Emergency Medical Services Authority
Health Care Services
Managed Health Care
Office of Health Information Integrity
Office of Innovation
Office of Law Enforcement Support
Office of Patient Advocate
Office of Surgeon General
Office of Systems Integration
Public Health
Rehabilitation
Social Services
State Hospitals
Statewide Health Planning and Development

As Governor Newsom announced, the Safe Schools for All Plan is a framework to support the safe operations of K-12 schools that are currently open for in-person instruction, and advance a phased-in approach to expanding the number of schools safely serving students in-person. For more information, please visit the Safe Schools for All Hub – schools.covid19.ca.gov – which will be updated regularly.

A key piece of this framework is the creation of a cross-agency Safe Schools for All Team, composed of dedicated staff from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Cal/OSHA, and educational agencies. We write on behalf of the Safe Schools for All Team to introduce ourselves and to highlight a few key issues we have heard regarding schools that are currently open or plan to re-open in the coming weeks.

A cross-agency team led by the California Health and Human Services Agency and CDPH has been working to consolidate state public health directives governing school reopenings, the guidance for safe operations of schools and school-based programs that was first issued on June 6, 2020, and related frequently asked question documents that have been issued over time. This update will reflect the most current evidence and science about operating schools in-person in a way that keeps students and staff safe.

The updated guidance is being released today. We wanted, however, to highlight two topics that have been the subject of multiple inquiries recently and that are receiving further clarification in the updated guidance. Given the timely interest, we think it is worth underscoring these points in conjunction with the consolidated update's release.

Re-opening. We continue to receive questions about what it means for a school to “reopen” and how a county’s shift back to the Purple Tier impacts planned school reopenings.

State of California

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR



MARK A. GHALY MD, MPH
SECRETARY

Aging

Child Support Services

Community Services and Development

Developmental Services

Emergency Medical Services Authority

Health Care Services

Managed Health Care

Office of Health Information Integrity

Office of Innovation

Office of Law Enforcement Support

Office of Patient Advocate

Office of Surgeon General

Office of Systems Integration

Public Health

Rehabilitation

Social Services

State Hospitals

Statewide Health Planning and Development

The term “open” or “reopen” refers to a school site that offers general in-person instruction to all students in at least one grade. Specifically, to meet the definition of “open” or “reopen,” the (a) school site must have (b) given all students in at least one grade the option to return for in-person instruction for (c) general instruction (i.e., not just one subject) for (d) at least part of the school-week. This includes a school that has offered all students in at least one grade the option of receiving in-person instruction for only certain days during the week (commonly referred to as a “hybrid” model). The school must also have begun offering such instruction only when authorized to do so under the K-12 Framework or, going forward, under the updated guidance, i.e., based on Tier status for the county in which the school is located.

This definition is in contrast to schools offering in-person instruction only for a particular subject or service (e.g., occupational therapy) or only for a particular student population (e.g., students with disabilities). In such circumstances, if the school is located in a county that shifts from Red Tier to Purple Tier, the school may continue serving the students in-person as it did as of January 14, 2021. It may bring additional students back for in-person instruction and services while in Purple Tier only if the school site adheres to the Cohort Guidance for those students.

Schools must have actually reopened for in-person instruction (using the definition above) while the county was in the Red Tier in order to remain open if the county moves to the Purple Tier. If the county is in Purple Tier on the day the school plans to reopen for in-person instruction, the school must wait until it is eligible again.

If a school was implementing a phased re-opening (e.g., only opened grades 9-10 for in-person instruction with set plans to phase in grades 11 and 12) while the county was in the Red Tier, the school site may continue its phased re-opening if the county reverts back to the Purple Tier, if authorized by Local Health Officer. This is only applicable to individual school sites. If a school district planned a phased reopening of its schools, the schools in that district that had not reopened for in-person instruction prior to reverting to the Purple Tier may not re-open until the county meets the reopening criteria.

This also applies to elementary schools with plans to reopen under the Elementary Reopening Process applicable to the Purple Tier under the updated guidance issued today. Even if the school previously received a waiver under the former Elementary Education Waiver Process or meets the conditions to reopen under the updated Elementary Reopening Process described in the updated guidance, if it has not yet opened for in-person instruction and the county case rate exceeds the criteria specified in the updated guidance (case rate > 25), the school must delay reopening until the county case rate drops below the threshold.

State of California HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR



MARK A. GHALY MD, MPH
SECRETARY

Aging
Child Support
Services
Community Services
and Development
Developmental
Services
Emergency Medical
Services Authority
Health Care Services
Managed Health Care
Office of Health Information
Integrity
Office of Innovation
Office of Law Enforcement
Support
Office of Patient Advocate
Office of Surgeon General
Office of Systems Integration
Public Health
Rehabilitation
Social Services
State Hospitals
Statewide Health
Planning and
Development

Distancing. Maximize space between seating and desks. Distance teacher and other staff desks at least 6 feet away from student and other staff desks. Distance student chairs at least 6 feet away from one another, except where 6 feet of distance is not possible after a good-faith effort has been made. Upon request by the local health department and/or State Safe Schools Team, the superintendent should be prepared to demonstrate that good-faith effort, including an effort to consider all outdoor/indoor space options and hybrid learning models. Under no circumstances should distance between student chairs be less than 4 feet. If 6 feet of distance is not possible, it is recommended to optimize ventilation and consider using other separation techniques such as partitions between students or desks or arranging desks in a way that minimizes face-to-face contact.

Short-term exposures of less than 6 feet between students and staff are permitted (e.g., a teacher assisting a student one-on-one), but the duration should be minimized and masks must be worn.

* * *

We hope that the above information is helpful as you continue to work with schools to support their safe reopening, to the extent permitted under state and local public health directives. For more information, please visit the Safe Schools for All Hub – schools.covid19.ca.gov – which will be updated regularly. Please also feel free to reach out via the Schools Hub for any technical assistance requests or to report concerns.

Sincerely,

Naomi S. Bardach, MD, MAS
Lead, CA Safe and Successful Schools Team
California Health and Human Services Agency

NOTE: Updated on Jan 19, 2021, to clarify schools are able to operate as they were operating as of January 14th.

