

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
976 Lenzen Avenue, 2nd Floor
San José, CA 95126
408.792.5040



July 17, 2020

Re: In-Person Instruction in Santa Clara County Schools

Dear School Districts and Educational Partners:

Today, Governor Newsom announced that the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued new mandatory requirements regarding the opening of schools for in-person instruction this upcoming school year. CDPH is generally requiring closure of all in-person activities at K-12 schools, public and private, in Santa Clara County as well as in the vast majority of the State because most counties are on the State's "monitoring list." Under the State's criteria, middle and high schools can only open once a county has been off the State's monitoring list for 14 days; elementary schools can open on schedule, but subject to approval by the local health officer.¹ We write to share several important updates regarding the implementation of these new State requirements.

First, as you know, the County Public Health Department and Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) have worked in close partnership to develop careful plans to facilitate the reopening of schools for in-person instruction this fall. We urge you to continue to plan for in-person instruction based on these guidelines and requirements, because we expect our community to continue to take strong and rigorous steps to control and contain COVID-19 in order to allow schools to safely and fully reopen. Indeed, we share the perspective that education is one of the most essential and critical sectors of our community to open, and that opening schools safely must be one of our top priorities.

General Closure of In-Person Operations and Activities

Consistent with the guidance of the CDPH, schools may not open for any in-person instruction, athletic or extracurricular activities, or other related functions, including hybrid learning models at this time. The attached mandatory directive implements the CDPH direction regarding this matter in our County. This directive will be updated once Santa Clara County is no longer on the monitoring list for 14 days.

¹ <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Schools%20Reopening%20Recommendations.pdf>

Waivers for Elementary Schools

The general closure applies to middle and high schools. With respect to elementary schools, the CDPH guidance specifically provides a pathway for in-person instruction:

A waiver of this criteria [mandating distance learning] may be granted by the local health officer for elementary schools to open for in-person instruction. A waiver may only be granted if one is requested by the superintendent (or equivalent for charter or private schools), in consultation with labor, parent and community organizations. Local health officers must review local community epidemiological data, consider other public health interventions, and consult with CDPH when considering a waiver request.

The County Public Health Department and SCCOE strongly encourages elementary schools to follow this process so that they can safely resume in-person instruction this fall.

This recommendation is based on the current best available scientific evidence, including that COVID-related risks in schools serving elementary age students appear lower than and different from the risks to staff and students in schools serving older students. In particular, there appears to be lower risk of child-to-child or child-to-adult transmission in children under 12, and the risk of infection and serious illness in elementary school children is particularly low. By contrast, the health-related risks for elementary age children who are not provided in-person instruction are significant, including lower rates of immunizations, higher rates of undetected child abuse and neglect, and risk to social/emotional wellbeing.

Moreover, in-person instruction is academically and socially critical for younger students, in alignment with State standards. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly harmed by a lack of access to in-person instruction. Schools serving elementary school students are also in a better position to put into place effective risk-reduction strategies to protect both teachers and students, including creation of small, stable classroom cohorts. Further, elementary school students without access to in-person school are far more likely than older students to require alternative group childcare arrangements when schools are closed, and as such, closure of elementary schools is less likely to significantly reduce transmission.

Accordingly, superintendents are encouraged to request a waiver from Public Health for fulltime or hybrid in-person instruction at the elementary level as follows:

1. Contact the Schools Unit at the County Emergency Operations Center at schools@eoc.sccgov.org requesting initiation of the waiver process.
2. Your district/school will be assigned a liaison to review your reopening plans, including for consistency with the prior requirements from Public Health issued in [COVID-19 Prepared: Reopening of Santa Clara County K-12 Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year](#)

and information regarding consultation with relevant stakeholders, including labor and parent and community organizations.

3. A waiver allowing in-person instruction will be granted by letter after review by Public Health, including review of local community epidemiological data, consideration of other public health interventions, and consultation with CDPH.

Our collective priority is to ensure safe reopening of instruction at the elementary level, where COVID-related risks to staff and students are less significant but other adverse harms from distance learning are greater. We believe that elementary schools, if implementing the recommendations and requirements provided by Public Health, can reopen for in-person instruction in a manner that is safe for staff and students. And we believe it is critical for our society to take all appropriate steps to reduce community transmission of COVID-19 to allow our schools to reopen and stay open.

We look forward to working with our elementary schools to facilitate maximum and safe in-person instruction this fall, while also bringing the overall community to a place where all schools can also reopen for in-person instruction.

Sincerely,



Sara H. Cody, M.D.
Health Officer and Director, Public Health Department
County of Santa Clara



Dr. Mary Ann Dewan, Ph.D.
County Superintendent of Schools
Santa Clara County

Attachment: Mandatory Directive for Schools (Issued: July 17, 2020)