

Governor's Safe Schools for All Reopening Plan

January 14, 2021

(This letter was reviewed and approved by the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services)

Dear Sonoma County School Community,

We know how extremely difficult it has been for students and families to have waited such a painfully long time to return to school. The pandemic's impact has been emotionally and socially difficult on the entire community—especially communities of color and essential workers. We are hoping for a safe return to school as soon as possible; however, there are multiple health and safety factors to take into account in order to make this happen.

The Sonoma County Office of Education and the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services would like to clarify the Governor's recommendations about school reopening in his new **Safe Schools for All Plan** and any misunderstandings it may have caused. Many in our community are under the impression that schools will reopen on February 1. The Governor's reopening dates are aspirational benchmarks, and may not be possible given the state of the virus in our county and state, and the fact that the details and funding have yet to be made available.

School reopening plans depend on several factors:

- Schools must review and incorporate into their planning the new, revised school reopening guidance just issued on Thursday, January 14. Each school/district will need to develop a "safety plan" to be approved by the county and state prior to reopening. School districts are committed to having plans in place so they can reopen as soon as it is safe to do so.
- As has been the case throughout this pandemic, school reopening plans are subject to the latest science and state guidance. The information that we have now could change in the future, and schools will continue to adapt as needed.
- Sonoma County is still facing a serious public health crisis, and we are now in a "deep purple tier," meaning schools are not allowed to reopen for in-person student instruction unless they received a waiver or are providing targeted, specialized instruction under the cohort guidance. Our COVID-19 cases are experiencing the biggest surge since the beginning of the pandemic. As of January 12, 2021, our 7-day average of new cases per day is 40.6 per 100,000, with an overall test positivity rate of 9.1 percent.

- When “safety plans” to reopen are approved, the state guidance is expected to institute a phased-in approach; TK-2 will return first, followed by older elementary grades, then middle school, and finally high school, which will be the most challenging.
- Districts are focusing hard on vaccination plans for school staff. This will ensure teacher and staff safety and be a key step to safely reopen. California has identified school staff as a priority for vaccination under Group 1b. They will be among the next to be vaccinated following the completion of Group 1a, which includes health care workers and residents and staff of long-term care facilities.)
- The County Office of Education is working with the County Health Services Department to coordinate the vaccination plan that will be followed to immunize school employees.
- Vaccinations for school staff could begin in February. Once the process begins, we estimate that it will take 2-3 months to complete—depending on the availability of the vaccine, demand for the vaccine, and many other factors.

We recognize that distance learning has been particularly difficult for students as they struggle with spending so much time in front of a screen apart from classroom learning and their friends. In these darkest months of the virus, we have to hold on a bit longer and stay focused on safety. We look forward to better days ahead for our schools while preparing for a safe return.

Please be assured that we are working cooperatively and collegially to do everything we can to advocate for a safe and secure reopening of our schools.



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Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools