

Health-Based Recommendations for School Planning/Distance Learning

August 19, 2020

Dear School Leaders,

Sonoma County is currently experiencing high case rates and test positivity rates that show significant uncontrolled community spread of the virus. Under this type of community spread, it is predicted that school opening would likely result in positive cases on campus, which would in turn create more disruption for students, families, and staff due to the need for isolation, quarantine, and possible school closure. This risk of infected individuals arriving on campus is illustrated in [new models provided by researchers at the University of Texas, Austin](#). This information validates the need to remain on distance learning to protect student, staff, and community health for the time being.

As of Tuesday, Aug. 18, here are some notable statistics:

- Case rate per 100,000 residents is 266.6, up from just 245.2 last Friday**
- 10.3% increase in hospitalizations**
- Only 11% of ICU beds are currently available**
- The test positivity rate is up to 7.8% (The state metric limit is 8%)
- The seven-day r-effective rate is 1.16, meaning that infections are increasing (14th highest in the State)
- The number of reported deaths is at 65, and the death rate per 100,000 residents is currently the second highest in the bay area.

***Sonoma County is currently out of compliance with several state metric limits that are used to place counties on the watch list.*

This and other information is available here:

- <https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap-counties/#track-data>
- https://public.tableau.com/views/COVID-19CasesDashboard_15931020425010/Cases?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no

As a reminder, schools cannot reopen without a waiver until Sonoma County has been off the watch list for 14 days. Sonoma County cannot come off the watch list until its case rate is below 100. In-person instruction waivers cannot be considered until the case rate is below 200.

In addition, the county is still working to increase its COVID testing and contact tracing capacity. With the current capacity, it would be insufficient to address the anticipated increase in caseload once students return to campus. Without adequate testing and contact tracing capacity, it would be inadvisable for school districts, charters, or private schools to reopen, as their ability to remain open

safely would be hampered by the need to respond quickly to isolate and quarantine confirmed cases and cohorts to prevent the spread of the disease on campus.

With the above data trends and testing factors noted, it is plausible a distance learning model may be necessary through December for many districts, charters, and private schools. Therefore, private schools, districts, and charters are encouraged to begin thinking about how to provide a distance-learning only model through December, if it is needed.

In order to help your communities prepare and have some sense of stability, you may wish to make a determination now to stay in distance learning through the first fall quarter. At that point, districts could reassess based on the current county epidemiology and testing/contact tracing capacity.

While this is not a mandate, and districts, private schools, and charters have autonomy to apply for a waiver when the case rate falls below 200 per 100k or open when the county has been off the state's monitoring list for 14 consecutive days, we encourage you to begin considering and planning with your school communities how to provide a distance-learning only model through December.

We know that resuming in-person classes is the desire of every district once it is safe to do so. At the same time, we must be pragmatic and flexible in the face of this ever-changing virus. Advising your communities of this possible scenario will help parents, teachers, and staff to be better prepared.



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