

# Navigating the Uncertainty of Reopening Schools: A Guide for Parents, Families, and the Public

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Most California students have started the 2020-2021 school year with distance learning. In the months ahead, parents, educators, and the public will have to weigh the costs and benefits of reopening schools in the midst of COVID-19. Included below are questions to ask when districts consider plans for reopening during the pandemic.

## Questions to Ask About Optimizing Physical Safety in Schools



### Physical Distancing

How will schools keep people six feet apart in the classroom, on the playground, in the restroom, and during transitions? Will schools create smaller class sizes? Will students be consistently grouped with a small number of the same students? What visual cues will be used to remind students to maintain social distancing?



### Cleaning Hands and Surfaces

How, and how often, will surfaces be cleaned? Who is going to do the disinfecting? If the school staggers start times, how will surfaces and equipment be cleaned between groups? How will schools reduce the use of, and maintain the cleanliness of shared items? Will students be well-trained on washing hands, wearing masks, and practicing social distancing?



### Health Screening

How will schools prevent people who are ill from entering the school? How will schools limit visitors? What provisions will be made for students and staff who become ill during the school day? What will policies be regarding confirmed or suspected illness in the homes of students and staff? How will learning continue during quarantine periods? How will contact tracing be conducted within the school community?



### Ventilation Systems

What, if any, changes to the physical plant, including HVAC infrastructure, equipment and filters, are being contemplated, by whom, and to what end? What are the trade-offs between short-term relief and long-term solutions? How will equity be maintained between and within school districts? Will classes be moved outdoors to take advantage of natural ventilation? What contingencies will be made for inclement weather?



### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

How will the school ensure that masks are properly worn? What precautions will be taken for children who are developmentally unable to wear masks effectively? What guidance will the district provide for appropriate masks? Will the school provide disposable masks to students who don't have one? Might transparent masks and face shields be made available? What physical barriers, such as Plexiglas between workstations, are being contemplated? How will PPE supplies be maintained?



### General Health

How will we work together to assure our children are fully immunized? What provisions will be made to ensure staff receive influenza vaccinations, and when it becomes available, COVID-19 vaccine? How will other health concerns, such as chronic or acute illnesses not related to COVID-19 be addressed? How will school meals be provided safely? What provision will be made for students and staff to receive behavioral health services as needed?

## Questions to Ask About Minimizing Community Transmission



### Self-Quarantining Logistics

Will schools set up a mechanism with the local or state health department to ensure that staff, students, and their contacts who are exposed are appropriately self-quarantined? Will schools and districts work with health officials to facilitate contact tracing?



### Monitoring Exposure & Infection

If a staff person or student tests positive, is ill or is exposed, how will schools know whether students and staff should self-quarantine for 14 days and when it is safe for them to return to school?

## Questions to Ask About Minimizing Community Transmission, continued



### Safety Training

Have all staff been thoroughly trained on safety protocols? Who provides this training, what is its composition, and how is it tracked?



### Immunization

Given the steep decline of immunizations among young children, what is the district's plan to increase immunization rates and prevent an outbreak of other communicable diseases during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Questions to Ask About Ensuring Learning Whether Schools Are Physically Open or Closed



### Instructional Practices

How will schools continue interactive learning in a pandemic-altered classroom? How will teachers be trained to maximize experiential learning within the adjusted learning environment? What is the plan to disseminate innovative and effective instructional practices?



### Distance Learning

If the district employs distance learning, how will all students have access to computers and the internet? Who will supervise each child's online learning if their parents have to work? How much online time will students have with their teachers on an average day? What training will teachers receive? How will families be supported to optimize the home environment for learning? Will childcare or other in-person support be provided for families that need it?



### Equity

Early research suggests that the achievement gap between Black students, Latinx students, students in poverty, unhoused students, students with disabilities, foster youth, and gender nonconforming youth, compared to economically and educationally advantaged students, will grow as a result of school closures during the pandemic. What are districts doing to ensure these students get the differential supports needed to close learning gaps?



### Physical Education and Arts Education

How is the district delivering physical education? Is the district planning on fielding sports teams and how might it do that safely? How is the district going to teach other subjects that appear to have a higher potential to spread the virus like music and theater arts?

## Questions to Ask about How Schools Can Help Meet the Social-Emotional Needs of Students



### Dealing with Trauma

What do schools have in place to deal with the trauma of isolation, disease, and disruption that children have experienced during the pandemic, as well as the social unrest, protests, and violence related to systemic racism?



### Support Staff

What is the ratio of students to counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses in the district schools? What is the district doing to supplement mental health support providers from outside the school system?



### Family Support

What is the district doing to attend to the mental health needs of parents and educators so that they can best support their children's well-being? Can partnerships between the district, the schools, and mental health professionals be developed to augment existing services?



### Equity

Given the disproportionate infection rates among Black and Latinx students as well as students in poverty, how is the school district providing support to the most vulnerable students and families?