

School Reopening Considerations: Planning and Assumptions



How to Use This Guide

This document was created as a collaborative resource, based on consultations with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, the CDE, and other county offices of education around the state. It is intended to provide information and considerations for schools to use when planning for the reopening and continued operation of school while COVID-19 persists. However, it is important to note that much is still unknown about the virus and what it will look like in the Fall. Additionally, there is no one-size-fits-all plan for Sonoma County school districts. For instance, reopening could look very different for small, rural school districts than larger, urban ones.

Districts and charters are encouraged to be knowledgeable of current information and guidance released by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services and to work collaboratively with collective bargaining units and stakeholders in the development and implementation of plans and actions.



How to Plan for the Reopening of School Campuses

Once shelter-in-place restrictions are lifted, state and local leaders have indicated that schools will likely need to “toggle back and forth” on social distancing restrictions in response to changing conditions until “herd immunity” is achieved in the state.

Schools play a vital role in the economic and social health of a community, providing food, childcare, social-emotional support, and of course, education to children of all social and economic backgrounds. While the goal is to resume campus operations as soon as it is safe to do so, student and staff health must be paramount during these unprecedented times.

Based on available information, it is reasonable and prudent for the K-12 schools in Sonoma County to create contingency plans for a range of possible school operations scenarios, based on the assumptions laid out in the following section.



Assumptions

1. It will be safe for schools to return to normal operations when all the following have occurred:

- a. The California stay-at-home order has been lifted
- b. The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county has remained constant or declined for 28 consecutive days
- c. The directive to physically distance has been removed
- d. Limits on group gatherings have been lifted

2. The virus that causes COVID-19 will remain in circulation until a vaccine is developed and widely used.

- a. A vaccine is not likely to be in broad use during the next 18 months.
- b. During this time, improvements in understanding of the virus and in testing will allow public health officials to act with greater precision when taking steps to slow the rate of infection. Broad stay-at-home orders and long-term school closures are not likely to be needed in the future.
- c. A second wave of infections is expected, possibly coinciding with flu season in October or November. This wave will not be as significant as the first but could result in site, district, regional, or countywide school closures for up to four weeks.
- d. Short-term closures of single or multiple schools will remain a possibility until a vaccine is widely used.
- e. Children and staff with significant health conditions will continue to be especially vulnerable during this time.
- f. Teaching and reinforcing prevention behaviors (handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette) and promoting flu vaccinations will continue to be important strategies in slowing the spread of this and other infectious diseases.
- g. Frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces will also be needed throughout this period.

3. Conditions are unlikely to improve quickly enough to allow schools to resume normal operations for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

- a. When the stay-at-home order is lifted, limits on group size may still be necessary and are likely to be stepped down in phases.
- b. It is highly unlikely that traditional graduation ceremonies and promotion assemblies will be allowed in early June. Even if permissible, convening large groups during this time frame may still be inadvisable.
- c. Extended School Year Special Education classes will remain on distance learning.

4. Deaths from COVID-19 are possible while the virus is in circulation.

- a. While the stay-at-home order and/or restrictions on group size are in place, normal community support mechanisms will not be available to assist with grieving.
- b. When schools can resume operations, deaths within the school community from COVID-19 will still be possible, especially for children and adults in high-risk categories.
- c. Develop a school community communications plan.
- d. Contact the SCOE/SOS Student Trauma Intervention Team.

5. The economic impacts of the pandemic will have significant and lasting impacts on schools.

- a. State tax revenues will fall well below those of previous years with reductions in school funding likely.
- b. Job layoffs and business closures will result in higher levels of unemployment, which will contribute to enrollment decline as families move out of Sonoma County to more affordable areas of the country.
- c. School nutrition programs will be needed by more students and will become a more significant portion of their access to food. Accommodations to provide continued access to meals for children who are ill or required to self-isolate may be necessary until COVID-19 is controlled.

6. School district enrollment will decline at a faster rate than we've seen in many areas of the country.

- a. Parent demand for enrollment in distance learning programs may increase as many will perceive them as a safer and more stable alternative to classroom-based instruction while COVID-19 is in circulation. This is made even more real if there is a second surge of cases in the fall.
 - i. Charter schools with well-established distance learning programs may see increased enrollment.
 - ii. Demand for enrollment in district and charter distance learning programs will also increase each time health officials impose social controls in response to upticks and hotspots.
 - iii. Assess your district's technology and support for economically disadvantaged students.
- b. Update family contact data to aid contact tracing by the County Health Department
- c. The high cost of housing in the county, coupled with high rates of unemployment will lead to movement out of the county.

7. Student and employee attendance rates will decline in 2020-21.

- Students and staff with COVID-19, and those who are directly exposed, may miss two or more weeks of school. In larger households, children may be required to miss school for an extended period if the disease affects other members of their family.
- School staff will become more concerned about COVID-19 symptoms and encourage students and staff with symptoms to stay home.
- Fear and rumors will also negatively impact student and employee attendance rates.
- Temporary employees/substitutes may be in more demand as employee absences rise.

8. Student learning outcomes going into the 2020-21 year will be uneven and vary broadly.

- Almost all students will begin the next year with learning deficits.
- The most able and advantaged are likely to be better off.
- The most disadvantaged are likely to suffer learning regression.



2020-21 Planning Phases and Scenarios



When considering actions needed for the 2020-21 school year, LEAs are encouraged to reflect upon each phase using three scenarios:

1. School closure orders are still in place
2. Schools open with mandatory social distancing and gathering restrictions/requirements
3. Schools open with no restrictions; normal operation can be resumed



Checklist for Alternative School Opening

☐ Carefully consider when to return schools to normal operations:

Even if all requirements on social distancing are lifted, districts and charter schools

should weigh the potential risks and benefits of returning to full operations during the current school year.

- ☐ Many parents will resist the idea that it is safe to return their children to school so soon after the apex of this crisis. Many others will be angry that they are being required to make this choice. Many staff members will share these concerns. Share your COVID-19 communications notification protocol with parents and staff.
- ☐ What are the district's or charter's goals for the school year? Are the intended outcomes substantial enough to warrant returning to full operations for a short period of time?
- ☐ Are we prepared to open with coronavirus in circulation? What special accommodations do we need to protect vulnerable students and employees? Do we have the supplies we need to maintain heightened prevention measures (hand sanitizer, cleaning, and disinfection products)?
- ☐ Do we have sufficient access to running water in classrooms for students to wash hands frequently? Many classrooms are without running water. Some classes held in portable buildings have no access to water except in bathrooms which are often located far from the portables shared by hundreds of students.
- ☐ Do we have the physical capacity to reopen schools in the time remaining? What are the impacts the prolonged closure has had on our readiness to return? What supplies and equipment must be returned or replaced? What activities must occur first? What staffing issues have occurred while we've been out?
- ☐ Have we prepared our employees to return? Have we identified all their concerns and are we prepared with responses?
- ☐ The 2020-21 school year will pose unique challenges. COVID-19 will remain an active threat. District leadership teams should work with staff to develop plans to meet those challenges for operating on modified schedules.

☐ **Create contingency plans to hold graduation and promotion ceremonies when it is safe to do so.**

While there is a small chance that graduation ceremonies may be permissible in mid-June, doing so will be perceived as a risk by many in the school community. Many parents will refuse to allow their children to participate and many more will be angered by the fact that they are being required to make that choice. Consider:

- ☐ Developing the capability to webcast these events to allow family members who cannot or should not attend to view the event.
- ☐ Developing plans to protect medically fragile students who are graduating.
- ☐ Creating contingency plans but hold off on scheduling events until there is greater clarity on when and if these events will be allowable.
- ☐ Developing plans to hold virtual graduation ceremonies if limits on group size prohibit larger gatherings.

❑ Adapt all processes and timelines necessary to prepare for the new school year.

- ❑ Use job-alike groups to examine all routines used to prepare for the next school year and develop alternative means for accomplishing the needed outcomes.
- ❑ Include adaptations that incorporate social distancing and online alternatives.
- ❑ Include special accommodations for people who are at higher risk, and those who may be sick or who must self-isolate, and those who lack internet access.

❑ Collaborate with employee associations when developing plans that impact the work of their members.

❑ Prepare for the possibility that the start of the 2020-21 school year may need to be delayed.

- ❑ Calendars with start dates earlier in the summer are more likely to be impacted than those that start in September.

❑ Create plans to restore operations in phases.

Returning to full operations will require careful identification of the activities needed for return and the order in which they should be implemented. Create timelines and communication plans to support each phase.

- ❑ Playground use, recesses, lunch breaks, etc... may need to be changed. Steel play structures and “big toys” may need to be restricted or wiped down before/after use.
- ❑ Loading of buses may need to change. Coordinate with Transportation Directors to determine schedules.
- ❑ Verify with County Health Department if students need to be in medical/traceable group clusters.

❑ Consider the precautions necessary to protect students with special needs relative to the threat posed by COVID-19.

- ❑ What does a free and appropriate education look like for students who are immunosuppressed or who have significant health challenges?
- ❑ What special procedures will be necessary to protect students in classrooms that serve severely handicapped students?

❑ Create plans to assess and respond to the uneven outcomes created by school closures.

- ❑ What formative assessment tools can we use to understand the individual and collective needs of our students?
- ❑ What is our plan to accelerate learning and close gaps once school reopens?

❑ Develop a continuum of distance learning options that may need to be developed should school be interrupted again in 2020-21.

- ❑ Develop robust independent study programs as an alternative for parents who want this option. Include a variety of options that allow students in independent study programs to participate in campus life (electives, sports, dances, etc.).
- ❑ Consider the use of learning centers to support student learning with weekly in-person and virtual appointments for support.
- ❑ Develop the capacity to provide synchronous interactive distance learning (via classroom webcast) as a means of providing instruction for students who cannot physically participate in classroom instruction.
- ❑ Develop the capacity to provide home and hospital instruction (Education Code Section 48206.3) via the internet (Zoom or other means) to assist students who are ill, under quarantine, or in self-isolation.
- ❑ During closures, use a virtual learning center approach to provide individual and small-group instruction to all students at least once per week by appointment.
 - ❑ Provide in-person appointments using social distancing and prevention measures as an option if connectivity is not available.

❑ Develop a continuum of strategies for implementation if social distancing is required.

Identify all locations and times where students are in close contact with each other and create strategies to restructure those locations and activities. Consider altering bell schedules, staggering start times, creating multiple recess and lunch periods, and creating multiple meal distribution points. In secondary schools, consider implementing a block schedule to reduce student movement during the day and cross contamination of classrooms.

Remember to maintain social distancing standards. For medical tracing, it may be necessary to keep students in continuous cluster groups (teachers would change classrooms, but students would stay in the same classroom/cohort).

☐ **Develop plans to blend classroom and distance learning as an alternative to school closures.**

The following options are listed in no particular order of preference and are only suggestions based on current conditions and information available at this time. Each district may determine the best option that works for their students and school community. Districts are welcome to define an alternative or blended model to conform with social distancing standards set by the County Health Officer.

Option 1

Limit the number of students on campus to 50% of normal.

- ☐ Divide all classes into two equal groups: one would come to school on Monday and Wednesday, the other on Tuesday and Thursday.
- ☐ All teachers provide each group with two days of direct instruction and support, and three days of assignments to complete at home each week.
- ☐ Secondary schools could also implement a block schedule to reduce passing periods and lower the frequency of touches in each classroom.
- ☐ Have teachers change classrooms, students would stay in the same classroom/cohort.
- ☐ Provide take-home meals for each eligible student before they leave each day.

Option 2

Limit the number of students on campus to 25% of normal.

- ☐ All classes are divided into four equal groups: one for each day of the week, Monday-Thursday.
- ☐ All teachers provide each group with one day of direct instruction and support, and four days of assignments to complete at home.
- ☐ Provide take-home meals for each eligible student before they leave each day.
- ☐ Use Friday for teachers to provide individual or small-group support by appointment or to prepare packets for the next week.

Option 3

For districts that can provide universal internet access, pair Option 1 or 2 with a classroom webcast to provide direct instruction five-days per week.

Option 4:

Rural schools and small districts with less than 100 students may choose to open with the understanding that recesses will be separated into smaller play areas/zones in compliance with social distancing requirements.

Option 5

Districts may opt for an AM/PM minimum-day schedule with a waiver filed with CDE to

waive the state minimum number of minutes.

Option 6:

Districts may opt for a blended learning program that alternates students between on-campus and distance learning each day/week.

☐ **Consider making work assignments and/or accommodations to protect employees in high-risk groups.**

- ☐ When possible and appropriate, assign teachers in high-risk groups to independent study programs.
- ☐ When possible and appropriate, assign classified employees in high-risk groups to roles and environments where social distancing can be maintained.
- ☐ Consider the installation of physical barriers in reception areas and workspaces where the environment cannot accommodate social distancing.

☐ **Develop and implement strategies to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.**

- ☐ Teach handwashing and cough and sneeze etiquette at all grade levels and reinforce on an ongoing basis.
- ☐ Schedule time and structure routines for handwashing at the start of each class period.
- ☐ Schedule frequent disinfection of high-touch surfaces.
- ☐ Have sanitizing solution in every classroom/office counter and wipe down phones between uses.

☐ **Advocate with state legislators to provide funding to make summer acceleration programs available to all students.**

- ☐ SB 884: Funding for summer school to make up missed days due to emergencies including fires, floods, poor air quality (due to smoke), PSPS events, pandemic, etc...
- ☐ Advocate for state transition funding to support COVID-19 implementation proposals.

☐ **Potential Financial Implications & Considerations**

- ☐ Due to loss of employment, schools may lose student enrollment.
- ☐ Due to parent cautiousness, parents may choose to keep students at

home and continue distance learning even when campuses reopen.

- ☐ If schools go to AM/PM schedule, can schools afford increased transportation costs?

☐ **In Developing a Communications Plan**

- ☐ Consider if a staff member or student becomes sick after schools resume.
- ☐ How will schools communicate with parents of incoming kindergarteners?
- ☐ How will you communicate to the press and public should there be the passing of an employee or student?
- ☐ Review district policies related to emergency preparedness and protocols

☐ **In Developing a District or School Site Medical Plan**

- ☐ Assess each schools nursing station for sick students.
- ☐ Have you installed plexiglass in office spaces and at nursing counters (similar to what many grocery stores have done at checkout counters)?
- ☐ Have waiting lines in offices and nursing bed stations six feet apart.
- ☐ As long as COVID-19 conditions persist, impose 36-hour fever rule following a normal illness before students and staff are permitted to return to school.

☐ **Consider Possible Complicating Factors**

- ☐ How would a PSPS impact distance learning or staggered schedules if schools or families do not have power?
- ☐ How would a wildfire impact distance learning or staggered schedules? What if children's homes or school facilities were damaged?
- ☐ How would a flood impact distance learning or staggered schedules? What if children's homes or school facilities were damaged?
- ☐ Consider other events that could potentially impact the alternative arrangements that you have made, including an active shooter, another illness, teacher/student death, and more.
- ☐

Appendix

National and State Guidance

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

- [Main schools page](#)
- [School reopening decision tree](#)
- [Cleaning and disinfecting guide](#)

State of California

- [Statewide industry guidance](#)
- [Industry guidance for office workspaces](#)

County of Sonoma

- [Health orders and guidance](#)
- [Business Mitigation Plan Template](#)

Sample plans and schedules

Samples Provided by North Bay School Districts for information sharing. These models may not be complete and should only be used as a starting point for an individual district's planning.

Small Elementary District Schedules

Examples to come...

Mid-Large Elementary District Schedules

CRITERIA/ RESTRICTIONS:

- SAFETY IS THE PRIORITY (realizing that all decisions may not align with best instructional practices)
- This list is not comprehensive, unfolding daily with information and updates from health officials
- Limit student and staff contact
 - Limit cohort size to reduce contact (TBD- up to 15?)
 - Use childcare program as placement criteria when making cohorts
 - Have siblings across schools attend on the same days
 - Limit movement across campus

- Restrict non-essential movement on campus or overlap between groups
 - Recess and lunch restrictions
 - Not changing classes
- Maintain clean campus
 - Clean spaces in between use
- Staff childcare
 - Allow staff to bring their own children into their classroom breakout rooms
 - Give staff priority to site-based childcare
 - Explore adding an infant/toddler childcare program designed for staff members' children

Possible Models

- Split classes into halves. Track A: attends class in person Monday/Tuesday. Track B: attends class Wednesday/Thursday. Both groups join Zoom to watch lessons for other groups. Friday is individual/small group support and services, and teacher planning. OR Track A: attends class in person Monday/Tuesday. Track B: attends class Thursday/Friday. Both groups join Zoom to watch lessons for other groups. Wednesday is individual/small group support and services, teacher planning, and extensive campus cleaning between tracks. OR Track A and Track B assigned one week or two week blocks alternating between distance learning classroom-based instruction.
 - Possibilities for specialists
 - Virtual push-in sessions
 - Friday Rotating Specials Day (virtual)
- Teachers may interact with 2 cohorts so will likely need to wear personal protective equipment including masks and gloves

Unified District Schedules

Examples to come...

Planning for Supplies

Schools should be well stocked in:

- soap
- paper products
- disinfectant wipes and solutions
- gloves
- masks
- hand sanitizers

Other items to consider:

- Touch-free hand sanitizer stations
- No-touch thermometers
- Plexiglass for high-traffic areas
- Additional equipment for technology needs

Facilities, Custodial, & Sanitation Considerations

Barriers

Consider the installation of physical barriers or plexiglass in high-traffic reception areas, workspaces, cafeterias, nurse stations etc. where the environment doesn't lend itself to social distancing.

Object placement

Identify all locations and times where students are in close contact with each other and create strategies to rearrange furniture, prohibit use of furniture, or restructure those locations and activities.

Floor markers

Mark spaces for waiting lines at least six feet apart in all directions.

PPE

Consider protocols to routinely stock, inventory, and replenish Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Stocking supplies

Disinfectant wipes, gloves, hand sanitizer, soap, and paper towels for hand sanitation should be widely accessible and stocked daily. Have sanitizing solution should be placed in every classroom and office space.

Sanitizing surfaces

Identify and schedule frequent disinfection of high-touch surfaces. Wipe down phones between uses. Follow labeling instructions for cleaning products as well as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance for schools and childcare centers.

All hands on deck

Consider temporarily engaging all employees in cleaning and disinfecting procedures for common areas, not just custodians, with appropriate training provided.

Equipment

Play structures, big toys, and other play equipment may need to be restricted or wiped down before/after use.

Path of travel

Use of specific facilities may need to be defined for each cohort. i.e. entrances, restrooms, paths of travel, etc. to ensure no mixing of cohorts.

Signage

Consider prominent, simple and concise signage for protocols, reminders, etc. around facilities.