

READY SCHOOLS, SAFE LEARNERS

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–21

Cohorting

Updated: April 6, 2021

Note: The previous requirement that “during the school day, students cannot be part of any single cohort, or part of multiple cohorts that exceed a total of 100 people within the educational week” has been removed.

Cohorts help manage risks in the potential spread of COVID-19. In particular, the size of the cohort matters for risk management. Student cohorting: (1) limits the number of exposed people when a COVID-19 case is identified in the school, (2) quickly identifies exposed individuals when a COVID-19 case is identified, (3) minimizes school-wide disruptions in student learning.

An exposure is defined as an individual who has close contact (less than 6 feet) for longer than 15 cumulative minutes in a day with a person who has COVID-19. If a student or staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19, then the LPHA should be consulted to review the situation. If a school cannot confirm that 6 feet of distancing was consistently maintained during the school day, *then each person the confirmed case was in contact with will need to quarantine – this could include* all members of a stable cohort. The clear documentation of the cohort members will allow for the LPHA to rapidly initiate [contact tracing](#). *Note that 6 feet continues to be the threshold of close contact for exposure determination by public health, even for students for whom at least 3 feet of physical distance from other students is recommended as a preventive measure.*

Student cohorting not only helps to quickly identify exposed people, it also minimizes disruptions to learning, because only the cohort members would be affected by the exposure. Maintaining small, stable cohorts can decrease the risk of closure to in-person instruction.

Students shall not be placed into full-time cohort groups based on any demographic or disability criteria (e.g., students with complex medical needs, students with IEPs, students receiving language services, etc.). Schools can create small groups within cohorts around skills and instructional needs. For example, a small instructional math group can be organized that is diverse by demographics, any disability criteria, speech/language services, or English language development.

What is Required?

- ❑ Establish stable cohorts:
 - The smaller the cohort, the less risk of spreading disease. As cohort groups increase in size, the risk of spreading disease increases.
- ❑ Each school must have a system for daily logs to ensure contact tracing among the cohort(s) (see section 1a).
- ❑ Minimize interaction between students in different stable cohorts (e.g., access to restrooms, activities, common areas). Provide access to All Gender/Gender Neutral restrooms.
- ❑ Cleaning and sanitizing surfaces (e.g., desks, dry erase boards, door handles, etc.) must be maintained between multiple student uses, even in the same cohort.
- ❑ Design cohorts such that all students (including those protected under ADA and IDEA) maintain access to general education, grade-level academic content standards¹, and peers.
- ❑ Minimize the number of staff that interact with each cohort to the extent possible, staff who interact with multiple stable cohorts must wash/sanitize their hands between interactions with different stable cohorts.
- ❑ Elementary staff who interact with multiple cohorts (music, PE, library, paraprofessionals who provide supervision at recesses, etc.) should have schedules altered to reduce the number of cohorts/students they interact with in a week. Consider having these staff engage via technology, altering duties so that they are not in close contact with students in multiple cohorts, or adjust schedules to reduce contacts.

What are Recommended Practices?

- ⇒ A smaller *and distinct* cohort size *limit* of 36 is recommended for public health and safety, and schools are *strongly* encouraged to create and maintain smaller cohorts when feasible.
- ⇒ When feasible, stable cohorts should remain in one classroom environment (*or outdoor learning space*) for the duration of the learning day, including lunch.
 - Teachers of specific academic content areas rotate instead of students to the maximum extent possible.

¹ Academic content standards refer to all of Oregon state academic standards and the Oregon CTE skill sets.

- In secondary schools or settings where students require individualized schedules or elective classes, plan for ways to reduce mixing among cohorts.
- ⇒ Assign restrooms, outside learning spaces, classrooms, or other activity areas for the exclusive use of one or a small number of stable cohorts rather than the entire on-campus population.
- ⇒ When feasible, limit the number of students in the building (e.g., rotating cohorts, blended learning with established cleaning between stable cohorts) to maintain requirements for physical distancing (see section 1c).