

READY SCHOOLS, SAFE LEARNERS

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–21

Updated: March 15, 2021

Navigating the 2020-21 School Year

How will my school and district navigate the 2020-21 school year?

Returning to in-person instruction is one of Oregon’s highest priorities. This priority goes hand-in-hand with supporting the health and safety of our students, staff and the families they return to each day. Schools not only provide the education that Oregon’s children need to succeed, but schools also provide for social-emotional growth and support, nutritious meals, and access to medical care.

We have been living with COVID-19 for approximately one year in Oregon and it will be with us for a long time to come. Vaccinations have begun being administered in Oregon, including vaccinations for the educator workforce. We have also learned a lot about how to reduce the spread of the illness in structured and regulated environments like schools. Through a measured and thoughtful approach, we can prioritize a quality education for Oregon’s children.

Oregon’s experience with the COVID-19 global pandemic is dynamic and we must continually adjust or add to our tactics to address changes in our circumstances. This includes integrating new knowledge about how the disease spreads; information regarding the effectiveness of safety protocols; impact of new virus variants on transmissibility and disease severity in people of various ages and risk levels; as well as the impact of community vaccination rates.

Governor Brown’s [Executive Order 21-06](#) and March 5, 2021 decision to “...return to the learning environment we know serves [students] best: in-person instruction” alters the metrics chart in section 0b and provides direct guidance for the operation of public schools.

Required

- ❑ *Not later than the week of March 29, 2021 all public elementary schools must operate in either an On-Site or Hybrid Instructional Model when they meet the specified county health metrics below in the chart below (green and yellow rows in the chart in Section 0b).*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school has communicated a plan to families and staff with a start date on or before the week of April 5, 2021 and is using the week of March 29, 2021 to train staff for a return to in-person instruction.*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school has a published calendar that shows they are not in session the week of March 29, 2021 and has communicated a plan to families and staff with a start date on or before the week of April 12, 2021 and is using the week of April 5, 2021 to train staff for a return to in-person instruction.*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school is closed to in-person instruction due to a decision made in partnership with a local public health authority or the Oregon Health Authority to move to Comprehensive Distance Learning to address active transmission within a school.*
 - *Any school not meeting this requirement will be reviewed and may result in loss of eligibility to receive state school funds or other enforcement as prescribed by Governor Brown's [Executive Order 21-06](#).*
- ❑ *Not later than the week of April 19, 2021 all public middle and high schools must operate in either an On-Site or Hybrid Instructional Model when they meet the specified county health metrics below in the chart below (green row in the chart in Section 0b).*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school has communicated a plan to families and staff with a start date on or before the week of April 26, 2021 and is using the week of April 19, 2021 to train staff for a return to in-person instruction.*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school has a published calendar that shows they are not in session the week of April 19, 2021 and has communicated a plan to families and staff with a start date on or before the week of May 3, 2021 and is using the week of April 26, 2021 to train staff for a return to in-person instruction.*
 - *A general allowance will be provided if the school is closed to in-person instruction due to a decision made in partnership with a local public health authority or the Oregon Health Authority to move to Comprehensive Distance Learning to address active transmission within a school.*
 - *Any school not meeting this requirement will be reviewed and may result in loss of eligibility to receive state school funds or other enforcement as prescribed by Governor Brown's [Executive Order 21-06](#).*
- ❑ *The requirement to offer On-Site or Hybrid Instructional Models does not apply to virtual charter schools as defined in ORS 338.005 or a public school that has a permanent instructional model that is predominantly through online courses.*

- ❑ *Public schools may transition a portion or all of the school to Comprehensive Distance Learning when responding in partnership with a local public health authority or the Oregon Health Authority to control active transmission of COVID-19 in the school setting.*
- ❑ *Public schools may transition a portion or all of the school to Comprehensive Distance Learning when they are operating in a county whose metrics place it in the operational status represented by the red row in the chart in section 0b. Public middle and high schools may transition a portion or all of the school to Comprehensive Distance Learning when they are operating in a county whose metrics place it in the operational status represented by the red or yellow row in the chart in section 0b. When county trends are increasing, pause expansion of additional in-person learning and maintain access to current in-person learning for schools that have it in place. Schools are not advised to reduce in-person instruction or revert to Comprehensive Distance Learning based on county metrics if the school can demonstrate the ability to limit transmission in the school environment.*
- ❑ *If your public or private school is operating an On-Site or Hybrid Instructional Model, but is located in a county that does not meet the advisory metrics; that is, an elementary school in a county that is not in the On-Site or Hybrid (green) row or the Elementary On-Site or Hybrid (yellow) row or a middle or high school in a county that is not in the On-Site or Hybrid (green) row (Section 0b); the school must offer access to on-site testing for symptomatic students and staff identified on campus as well as those with known exposures to individuals with COVID. This resource is available to all schools in Oregon. [See guidance from the Oregon Health Authority.](#)*
 - *Schools required to offer access to this program will have two-weeks to be registered, trained, and administering the program when, or if, metrics change in their county in a way that makes this program a requirement.*
 - *The metrics found in the 0b Section of RSSL are what determines if a school is required to offer the program.*
 - *The school testing program offers an additional risk-mitigation strategy that is relatively low-burden and can help offset impacts of operating when community spread is higher even if school transmission is low/absent and RSSL protocols are firmly in place. This requirement applies anytime a school is operating in an Instructional Model that is not aligned with the county metrics case data. This is true whether your school began operating in August/September, or took a pause, or opened on January 4, or is just opening for the first time.*
 - *The testing program is for students in grades kindergarten and up and school staff. The program does not include early learning programs.*
 - *Registering for the testing program includes a self-attestation that the program will be offered. Please accept the responsibility to offer the program when you register.*
- ❑ *If your school is operating an On-Site or Hybrid Instructional Model, but is located in a county that does not meet the advisory metrics (Section 0b), the school must provide a Comprehensive Distance Learning Instructional Model option for students and families that choose to remain off-site. For schools and districts that are required to comply with all*

sections (0-8) and supplements to this guidance, the remote option must comply with the requirements of the Comprehensive Distance Learning Instructional Model. The school or district may determine the most beneficial way to staff this option, through partnership with other schools or ESDs or with staff who may be at more risk from COVID-19 or through other means.

- ❑ *All public and private schools are required to keep their Operational Blueprint up-to-date on [ODE's website](#) and to submit weekly "[Status Reports](#)" that provide essential information regarding how many students are served in person in the implementation of this metrics framework.*

Recommended

- ⇒ ***Applying an Equity-Based Decision Tool** - When schools are considering transitioning between instructional models (i.e., On-Site, Hybrid, Comprehensive Distance Learning) through progression in the advisory metric chart (above), they should employ an [equity-based decision tool](#) to illustrate and address potential positive and negative impacts on students, families, and staff from all communities. A decision tool can inform a school around issues of equity in implementation, including: timing, costs (to schools and families), capacity, morale, professional learning needs and more. Importantly, as communities in Oregon are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, a decision tool can ensure the school is making the best possible decision to serve each student. In this time, it is critical that schools maintain a strong relationship with those they serve.*

Whenever individuals come together there is additional risk of spreading COVID-19. Oregon's [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) guidance can help reduce, but not eliminate, this risk. Oregon has experienced some COVID-19 cases in schools, but there is little evidence of transmission in school settings, mirroring experiences in other states with on-site instruction occurring with health and safety protocols in place. As more students and staff reenter schools we will continue to see cases. Schools should ensure strong entry screening measures are in place and make use of the [COVID-19 Exclusion Summary Guidance](#) and refer to the [Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools Toolkit](#) to address positive cases, symptomatic individuals, and exposure.

It is critical that we all adhere to the [key practices for reducing spread of COVID-19 in schools](#), to ensure that our schools can open with safe protocols and stability:

- Maintain physical distancing
- Use face coverings
- Use personal protective equipment when indicated
- Increase hand hygiene
- Serve students and staff in as small and as stable cohorts as possible



- [Be prepared to isolate and quarantine](#) at the first sign of illness or exposure
- Regularly clean and disinfect facilities in the environment
- Maximize airflow and ventilation

ODE and OHA are committed to re-examining these metrics as more information is learned about the introduction of COVID-19 to schools and transmission in school settings. The science and data supporting these metrics [are continually monitored](#). These metrics and RSSL guidance will continue to be updated, or affirmed, at least quarterly.

What if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 at my school?

Outbreaks are determined by Oregon Health Authority and Local Public Health Authorities. All plans for fall On-Site and Hybrid instruction must include a school's response to an outbreak. In the event that there is a single positive case or a cluster of cases of COVID-19, schools and districts must partner with the Local Public Health Authority (LPHA) who will work to support them on ongoing COVID-19 mitigation efforts. *The ["Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools Toolkit"](#) will support schools in developing safe and effective plans to respond to outbreaks.*

FERPA allows schools to share personally identifiable information with local public health authorities without consent when needed to respond to a health emergency. Schools should work with their Local Public Health Authority ([LPHA](#)) to ensure they are able to effectively respond to and control outbreaks through sharing of information, even without parental consent, when appropriate. Consult with district legal counsel for more clarification. Your LPHA will attest to receiving the Operational Blueprint and reviewing sections 1-3 and will work with you to mitigate ongoing COVID-19 impacts.

Infection Control

Schools must implement measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 within the school setting, such as appropriate disinfectant/sanitizing procedures; screening, monitoring, and isolation/exclusion for illness among symptomatic staff and students; use of face coverings; and limiting interactions between different groups of students (e.g., teachers moving between classrooms rather than students).

All districts and public charter schools must update their written Communicable Disease Management Plan to specifically address the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. OAR 581-022-2220 requires school districts to develop, update and maintain a Communicable Disease

Management Plan. In addition, all district policies related to communicable diseases and student health and wellbeing should be reviewed and updated to assure alignment with new public health requirements.

Required

- *Conduct a risk assessment as required by OSHA administrative rule [OAR 437-001-0744\(3\)\(g\)](#).*
 - OSHA has developed a [risk assessment template](#).
- Implement measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 within the school setting, including when the school setting is outside a building
- Update written Communicable Disease Management Plan to specifically address the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. Examples are located in the [Oregon School Nurses Association \(OSNA\) COVID-19 Toolkit](#).
 - *Review OSHA requirements for infection control plan to ensure that all required elements are covered by your communicable disease management plan, including making the plan available to employees at their workplace. Requirements are listed in OSHA administrative rule [OAR 437-001-0744\(3\)\(h\)](#).*
 - OSHA has developed a sample [infection control plan](#).
- *Designate a single point-person at each school to establish, implement, support and enforce all RSSL health and safety protocols, including face coverings and physical distancing requirements, consistent with this guidance and other guidance from OHA. This role should be known to all staff in the building with consistent ways for licenced and classified staff to access and voice concerns or needs.*
- *Create a simple process that allows for named and anonymous sharing of concerns that can be reviewed on a daily and weekly basis by the designated RSSL building point-person. Example: Anonymous survey form or suggestion box where at least weekly submissions and resolutions are shared in some format.*
- Include names of the LPHA staff, school nurses, and other medical experts who provided support and resources to the district/school policies and plans. Review relevant local, state, and national evidence to inform plan.
- Process and procedures established to train all staff in sections 1 - 3 of this guidance. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure physical distancing is maintained to the maximum extent possible.
- Protocol to notify the local public health authority ([LPHA Directory by County](#)) of any confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff.
- Plans for systematic disinfection of classrooms, *common areas*, offices, *table surfaces*, bathrooms and activity areas.
- Process to report to the LPHA any cluster of any illness among staff or students.
- Protocol to cooperate with the LPHA recommendations.
- Provide all logs and information to the LPHA in a timely manner.

- Protocol for screening students and staff for symptoms (see section 1f).
- Protocol to isolate any ill or exposed persons from physical contact with others.
- Protocol for communicating potential COVID-19 cases to the school community and other stakeholders (see section 1e).
- Create a system for maintaining daily logs for each student/cohort for the purposes of contact tracing. This system needs to be made in consultation with a school/district nurse or an LPHA official. Sample logs are available as a part of the [Oregon School Nurses Association COVID-19 Toolkit](#).
 - If a student(s) is part of a stable cohort (a group of students that are consistently in contact with each other or in multiple cohort groups) that conform to the requirements of cohorting (see section 1d), the daily log may be maintained for the cohort.
 - If a student(s) is not part of a stable cohort, then an individual student log must be maintained.
- Required components of individual daily student/cohort logs include:
 - Child's name
 - Drop off/pick up time
 - Parent/guardian name and emergency contact information
 - All staff (including itinerant staff, district staff, substitutes, and guest teachers) names and phone numbers who interact with a stable cohort or individual student
- Protocol to record/keep daily logs to be used for contact tracing for a minimum of four weeks to assist the LPHA as needed.
 - See supplemental guidance on LPHA/school partnering on contact tracing
 - Refer to [OHA Policy on Sharing COVID-19 Information](#)
- Process to ensure that all itinerant and all district staff (maintenance, administrative, delivery, nutrition, and any other staff) who move between buildings keep a log or calendar with a running four-week history of their time in each school building and who they were in contact with at each site.
- Process to ensure that the school reports to and consults with the LPHA regarding cleaning and possible classroom or program closure if anyone who has entered school is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Designate a staff member and process to ensure that the school provides updated information regarding current instructional models and student counts and reports these data in [ODE's COVID-19 Weekly School Status](#) system.
- Protocol to respond to potential outbreaks (see section 3).

What is a local decision and what is a state-level decision?

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE), in coordination with the Oregon Health Authority



(OHA), is updating the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance for the 2020-21 School Year in accordance with Governor Brown's Executive Order [21-06](#) and [Governor Brown's March 5, 2021 decision](#) to *"return to the learning environment we know serves [students] best: in-person instruction."* The Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance became effective on July 1, 2020 and will remain in effect *until it is rescinded*. This guidance updates and replaces prior guidance.

This guidance is developed jointly by ODE and OHA and is informed by U.S. Department of Education and CDC guidance along with information from many other sources. Guidance in Ready Schools, Safe Learners and any connected documents is what schools must follow where or if there are contradictions with other sources, including the CDC.

Decisions about when or how schools need to respond to an outbreak of COVID-19 involve collaboration across multiple jurisdictions and in alignment with the guidance in the [Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools Toolkit](#). If part or an entire school needs to close to in-person instruction and transition from On-Site or Hybrid Instructional models to Comprehensive Distance Learning models as a matter of public health, or return from Comprehensive Distance Learning Models to Hybrid or On-Site models, it is also important that educators, students, families, and the general public have a clear understanding of how decisions are made and who makes those decisions.

When determining if part or an entire school needs to close, schools should work in a collaborative manner with Local Public Health Authorities (LPHAs). LPHAs are vital partners to advise and consult on health and safety in schools with school officials but in general decisions of public health at the local level reside with school and district officials. There can be exceptions within local law and any additional authorities should be clarified at the local level.

Additionally, the authority of an educational governing body or school employee to close a school facility and shift to distance learning may vary depending on what governance structure is in place and the type of school. This guidance covers the most common governance structures:

School districts: School district boards have the authority to close district facilities and transition to distance learning. Boards have generally delegated to the Superintendent of the school district the ability to make this decision.

Education service districts: Education service district boards have the authority to close education service district facilities and transition to distance learning. Boards have generally delegated to the Superintendent of the education service district the ability to make this



decision. If a facility is utilized by students from component school districts the ESD should also collaborate with those component school districts about how to continue to serve students.

Public charter schools: Public charter school boards have the authority to close a charter school facility and transition to distance learning. Boards have generally delegated to the Director of the charter school the ability to make this decision. However, such a decision should also be made consistently with the charter of the school which may require additional steps such as notice to the school's sponsor. Additionally, a sponsor of a public charter school may terminate the charter agreement of a school and close the school if the school is endangering the health and safety of students.

Oregon School for the Deaf: The Director of the Oregon Department of Education has the authority to close the Oregon School for the Deaf and transition students to distance learning.

Private schools: The authority to close a private school and transition to distance learning varies depending on the governance structure of the school.

If a Local Public Health Authority has concerns about public health in a given school within the operation of this guidance or in response to an outbreak and the school or district disagree, these concerns may be elevated to the State Public Health Director or the Director of the Oregon Department of Education.

The State Public Health Director at the Oregon Health Authority has broad authority to close a facility that presents a public health risk.

The Director of ODE also has authority to close a school facility within existing state laws and within the scope of Executive Order 20-29. ODE also has the authority to address any complaints raised regarding practices that do not confirm with the requirements in this guidance and take other actions. These actions include referring complaints to the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) and the potential to withhold State School Fund (SSF) payments if needed and as a means of last resort.

ODE and OHA have updated common statewide [protocols for a variety of scenarios](#), in collaboration with LPHAs, schools, and districts, to improve coordination and shared understanding of how to respond to cases and outbreaks of COVID-19.

Oregon OSHA also enforces workplace safety rules and statutes. Oregon OSHA will address employee and other inquiries and complaints, and provide advice to employers related to any potential violation of existing Oregon OSHA rules or directives issued by Gov. Kate Brown if they



involve potential workplace exposure. If you believe a school is not in compliance with the RSSL guidance you can file a named or confidential complaint with Oregon OSHA at 1-833-604-0884 [or online](#).

Except where it requires compliance and is labeled as “Required” and often indicated with a checkbox (☐), the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance is advisory and intended to provide school districts with information and best practices in delivering education services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Where the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance does not require a specific action by districts, districts may choose whether to consider or implement advisory information or recommendations labeled “Recommended” and often indicated with an arrow (⇒).

Nothing in the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance is intended to provide legal advice. ODE encourages districts to consult with their own legal counsel and to consider other state and federal guidance and laws when implementing any recommendations of the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance.