

Frequently Asked Questions

Sonoma County Schools and the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy

Oct. 1, 2020

What is The California Blueprint for a Safer Economy and what are the state requirements for allowing schools to reopen for in-person instruction?

- On August 28 Governor Gavin Newsom announced that California was adopting a new COVID-19 pandemic plan, called “[The Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#)”, to manage how and when the economy could reopen. This includes when schools are allowed to reopen.
- Every county in California is assigned to a tier based on its rate of new cases and positivity percentage. The new system contains four tiers: purple (widespread risk level), red (substantial risk level), orange (moderate risk level), and yellow (minimal risk level).
- When the Blueprint activated on August 31, Sonoma County was categorized in the Widespread (purple) category. All California County COVID-19 data is evaluated weekly on Tuesdays.

When will Sonoma County Schools reopen for in-person instruction?

- While we remain in the purple tier, it is not possible to identify a date for when schools will be allowed to consider reopening. Sonoma County public schools are currently open for *full distance learning* and staff are working hard to support students and families remotely.
- Sonoma County was categorized by the Blueprint in the Widespread (purple) category on August 31. The Blueprint indicates that counties must meet the criteria for the Substantial (red) category for two weeks before officially moving into that tier. Once Sonoma County is officially in the red tier, the state dictates that schools must still wait an additional **two weeks** until they are authorized to reopen under the state’s framework. This means that, even when Sonoma County meets the criteria for the red tier, it will still be **four weeks at a minimum** before schools would be able to reopen without a waiver.
- Once we are in the red tier, each of the 40 public school districts in Sonoma County is responsible for developing and implementing its own reopening plan based on local and state guidance. Many districts are considering a gradual, phased-in approach to

reopening that prioritizes the safety of staff and students, as well as students' academic and social/emotional needs.

- Schools in the purple tier aren't permitted to reopen for in-person instruction, unless they receive a waiver from their local health department for TK-6 grades.
- Some schools may opt to apply for a waiver to operate some elementary classes if they believe they can do so safely given resources and local conditions. Additionally, the state allows schools to run small, targeted group instruction for students at high-risk. Some schools are considering offering this form of small group instruction as well.

What will in-person instruction look like when it is allowed?

- Schools that choose to reopen must follow the [California Department of Public Health Guidance](#) and the [Sonoma County Office of Education's Roadmap to a Safe Reopening](#).
- Sonoma County schools are carefully considering the safety of staff and students, and the varied and individualized needs of students and families.
- Most schools and districts have previously adopted plans for a hybrid or full distance learning model for the semester. Some may choose to continue with full distance learning for the time being to assess the implementation of plans, negotiate with labor partners, and make other arrangements as needed.
- School districts must also plan for how to conduct contact tracing of any sick students/staff and routine COVID-19 testing for all staff. SCOE is working to support districts with these costly and complex requirements.

Once a school is open, could it have to close again?

- Schools that have reopened for in-person learning under the red tier will NOT be required to close if the county moves into the purple tier, provided that the following California Department of Public Health criteria are met:
 - School closure may be appropriate when there are multiple cases in multiple cohorts at a school or when at least 5% of the total number of teachers/student/staff are cases within a 14- day period, depending on the size and physical layout of the school.
 - A superintendent should close a school district if 25% or more of schools in a district have closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days, and in consultation with the local public health department. Districts may typically reopen after 14 days, also in consultation with local public health.



- The local public health officer may also determine school closure is warranted for other reasons, including results from public health investigation or other local epidemiological data.

What is the role of the Sonoma County Office of Education in reopening schools?

- SCOE serves in a liaison role between county health and the school districts, providing resources, support, and information.
- Additionally, SCOE is working to support districts with putting in place COVID-19 testing and contact tracing programs.
- SCOE can not order closures or reopening of schools.

What can families do now?

- Sonoma County public schools are open for distance learning and staff is available.
- Sonoma County's highly qualified and dedicated school staff have trained, collaborated and made remarkable adjustments to teaching methods and curriculum to better fit a virtual distance learning model.
- Families can reach out for support. Contact your child's teacher or your school or district office.
- Academic resources and support as well as technology equipment are available.

What can families expect next?

- California's new Blueprint is a radical change from the previous County Monitoring List.
- All districts and schools are assessing the requirements and will be making decisions that prioritize the safety of staff and students, as well as students' academic and social/emotional needs.
- Some districts may soon or already have surveyed families for input.
- Families can check their child's school district website and communication channels for further announcements and information.