

## **SCOE/SCDHS Issue Joint Statement on School Reopening Guidelines**

On Wednesday, June 24, Sonoma County Superintendent Dr. Steve Herrington met with Sonoma County Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase, Sonoma County Director of Health Services Barbie Robinson, and Deputy County Counsel Adam Radtke, to further discuss the school reopening guidelines, Roadmap to a Safe Reopening, based on the ever-changing conditions and state guidance around COVID-19.

Specifically, they met to discuss:

1. The impact of a new state requirement that all Californians over age two must wear a mask in most public settings, including schools, and
2. What conditions need to be in place before the health officer believes that it would be considered safe for schools to consider reducing the distance between students from six feet to an amount that would accommodate more students. For instance, a four-foot distancing standard allows for larger class cohorts that would enable many schools to have children come back five days per week rather than on a hybrid schedule.

Dr. Mase and Dr. Herrington shared a common desire to take an evidence-based, health-first approach to reopening schools, while also supporting working families and students with special needs for whom a hybrid model of learning will be very challenging.

**They agreed to continue with the county’s evidence-based approach by maintaining a six-foot distancing standard at the beginning of the school year. After about a month of school being back in session, the health officer and the county superintendent will reconvene to look at the data and see whether a more permissive student distancing standard is supported by the data.** The data they will be considering will include:

- Overall community spread
- The number of cases/outbreaks in schools
- The impact of children potentially needing to be exposed to a second “cohort” in after-school programs
- The effectiveness of the hybrid learning model, and the impact on working parents

If the data supports moving to a student distancing standard of less than six feet, after school is in session for a month, then schools would be allowed to do so. The county

and schools would then assess the impacts of a lesser distancing standard before eventually returning to a full reopening with no distancing requirements.

Regarding the state's mask requirement, we understand that the issue is still being discussed at the state level, and additional guidance for schools is expected to be provided soon. **Dr. Herrington and Dr. Mase agreed that they will wait to see the final guidance from the state before amending the current Sonoma County school reopening guidelines.**

Following this conversation, and in order to be prepared in this ever-changing environment, **we advise districts to prepare for a range of scenarios**, including a six-foot distancing model for opening, a four-foot model for transitioning, a model with no distancing requirements, and an all-distance-learning model in the event that we see another spike of the virus within the county. We know that this is a heavy lift, and SCOE will continue to support districts in their efforts to create a safe environment for school, staff, and students.

We continue to encourage schools to offer distance learning options for students and teachers with health or other concerns related to school reopening.

This collaborative effort by Dr. Herrington and Dr. Mase continues to support and build on the guiding principles that serve as the foundation of the Roadmap to A Safe Reopening. Those principles are:

- Protect student, staff, and community health
- Foster student learning and progress
- Maintain positive learning environments
- Foster student emotional health
- Care for our most vulnerable populations