



NEWS RELEASE

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Updated Guidance Serves As A Guide For Schools Returning Students To In-Person Instruction

Operating schools in-person is now a local decision, made in partnership with local public health authorities. Stable in-person instruction relies on low community case rates and the ability to implement health and safety protocols in schools with fidelity.

(Salem, Ore.) – As part of its planned guidance and metrics review process with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is releasing an update to the [Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance](#), including updated advisory metrics for returning students to in-person instruction. The metrics are based on the latest COVID-19 studies and data and help Oregon’s schools make informed decisions about returning to in-person instruction.

The key changes in this update include:

- Governor Brown returned the decision for operating schools in-person to the local level on January 1, 2021. This guidance provides local leaders with guidance, information, and resources they need to make informed decisions.
- Updated advisory metrics aligned to the Harvard Global Health Institute recommendations. These metrics allow for a return to in-person instruction for elementary students at higher levels of community case rates than previously recommended.
- A new requirement, that when students and staff return to in-person instruction out of alignment with the metrics, schools must offer access to on-site COVID-19 testing for symptomatic students and staff identified on campus as well as those with known exposure to individuals with COVID-19.
- Multiple new resources to support learning outside, field trips, equitable grading practices, attendance best practices, contact tracing partnerships, COVID-19 testing, and more.

“We are providing school leaders with the information they need to make local decisions about returning to in-person instruction,” said ODE Director Colt Gill. “We all know that in-person instruction provides our children and families with access to an equitable education. Schools are a center of services to students and families, offering nutritious meals, access to social-emotional and mental health supports, as well as physical health services. This guidance provides new resources to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and better meet students’ needs in this time.”



Critical Factors For Schools

As schools make decisions about returning to in-person instruction, they must focus on two critical factors:

1. It remains important that the community case counts (or case rates) are low enough that the community is not regularly introducing new COVID-19 cases into the school. The county metrics remain the best tool for determining when cases are down enough to return to in-person instruction.
2. The ability to implement public health and safety protocols in the school with fidelity. Oregon's guidance is comprehensive and includes diligent entry screening, universal use of face coverings, physical distancing, cohorting, frequent handwashing, and over 160 other requirements for mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

ODE engaged with nearly 2,000 school and community partners over the last two weeks, including Governor Brown's Healthy Schools Reopening Council and Medical Advisory Panel, to inform this update.

The guidance takes effect immediately. As conditions change, our guidance will be updated so that we can continue serving the needs of our students.

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