

February 5, 2021

Community Update on School Reopening and Vaccination Efforts

Dear Sonoma County School Community,

I know these have been extremely difficult times for our schools and community. Students have struggled academically and socially for almost a year. I, and the schools and districts my organization serves, realize how important it is to the entire community that Sonoma County schools reopen as soon and as safely as possible. I would like to share with you an update on the progress of school reopening in Sonoma County.

Each of the superintendents and school boards my office works with, passionately wants schools to reopen as soon as possible. To do so, several state-required components must be in place to ensure staff and student safety. Each local school board will decide when it is safe for their schools to reopen, but the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) is working closely with school districts to support them in their planning and meeting these requirements.

I'd like to share with you an exciting development regarding vaccines for school staff. If all goes well, on Monday, Feb. 8, we will begin administering COVID-19 vaccines to school employees. This will launch our effort to vaccinate 17,000 licensed childcare providers and preschools, TK-12 educators, support staff, and higher education staff throughout the county. While vaccines are only one part of a multi-pronged effort to reopen schools, they are a critical piece of the puzzle. They represent an important step forward in helping school staff feel safe to return to in-person learning.

During our first week of vaccinations, we hope to give about 1,100 vaccinations. We hope to quickly gear up in the weeks ahead to providing 3-4,000 shots per week —should the county get enough vaccines.

The first to be vaccinated will be any educators over the age of 70 *as well as* licensed preschool/childcare providers AND school staff who are providing regular, direct care and instruction to children. This priority was set in collaboration with the county health department in order to prioritize those with the greatest exposure. In the weeks ahead, we will move forward to vaccinate: first, all elementary school staff, then, middle and high school staff and district office staff, and finally, higher education staff who don't currently have contact with students. More information is available at scoe.org/vaccines.

We ask everyone for patience and understanding as we get this program operational. There will likely be challenges and small setbacks, and we are committed to working through them as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the work of reopening our schools moves forward at a rapid pace.

Schools are working hard to develop the state's newly required **COVID-19 Safety Plans**. While almost all school districts developed safety plans months ago, the state now requires a **new** plan which must be approved by our local public health department and the state before any elementary school can reopen while still in the purple tier. This new approval process may take several weeks. We are working closely with the health department to set schools up for success in completing and having these plans approved.

Steven D. Herrington | Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools

Board of Education | Gina Cuclis, Herman G. Hernandez, Peter Kostas, Andrew Leonard, Lisa Wittke Schaffner

Under the state’s new reopening guidance, elementary schools are eligible to reopen when the number of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents drops to 25 or below for five days or more. Middle and high schools have to wait longer—until we are in the “red tier,” when the number of cases per 100,000 residents is 7 or below. The state recommends that school districts in the purple tier phase in their reopening, bringing back just one or two grades at a time.

Schools have been hard at work for months making their campuses safe. This includes:

- Installing high-quality air filtration systems in many classrooms,
- Creating handwashing stations,
- Modifying classroom setups,
- Developing plans for student arrival and drop-off, and much more.
- Last fall, SCOE received and distributed to school districts one very large shipment of personal protective equipment; we will get another shipment soon.

SCOE is also helping districts to meet the state’s testing requirements for staff and students by developing partnerships with several testing vendors available for them to use.

I know this has been an incredibly frustrating time for our school community. Thankfully, our county’s case rate is steadily improving. School districts are working alongside teachers, school staff, and families to have all the pieces in place to reopen as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D.
Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools