

Press Release

Contra Costa to Begin Accepting Waiver Applications to Allow In-Person Classes at Elementary Schools

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Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Starting Wednesday, public and private elementary schools (TK – 6th grade) in Contra Costa County can submit applications to allow in-person instruction at their campuses. In accordance with state guidelines, waivers may be granted "when requested by a local superintendent (or equivalent for charter or private schools), in consultation with labor, parent and community organizations. Local health officers must review local community epidemiological data, consider other public health interventions, and consult with the California Department of Public Health when considering a waiver request."

School districts will be asked to detail how they would safely conduct in-person classes and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Applications will go to the Contra Costa County Office of Education for an initial review before being sent to Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) for further analysis.

CCHS and the County Office of Education have developed a checklist with safety measures schools must take in order to reopen. These measures include:

- A plan for testing of students and staff with

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COVID symptoms. Schools must also show they have a plan for periodically testing asymptomatic staff members.

- Each school must identify a person to help CCHS with contact tracing efforts if there is a positive case
- Showing how shared surfaces will be regularly cleaned and disinfected and how use of shared items will be minimized.
- Proper use of face coverings
- How students will be kept in small, stable, groups with fixed membership that stay together for all activities (e.g., instruction, lunch, recess) and minimize/avoid contact with other groups

Review by local and state officials will take approximately ten days. The state will make the final decision to approve or deny requests. Schools in counties such as Contra Costa that are on the state's COVID-19 monitoring list can't reopen unless granted a waiver by local and state health officials.

"We feel like we've reached a point where it makes sense to consider requests from elementary schools to reopen," said Dr. Chris Farnitano, health officer for Contra Costa County. "Our role will be to ensure that schools have a solid plan in place to protect their students and staff and show us how they will work with the health department when there is a case to prevent further spread of the virus."

The state outlined the waiver process for elementary schools two weeks ago. CCHS did not immediately begin accepting waiver applications because of the increasing prevalence of COVID-19 in our community at the time.

Since then, the situation has stabilized enough to begin reviewing school-waiver applications, said Dr. Farnitano. Case rates and COVID-related hospitalizations, for instance, have leveled off in August after spiking in July.

While school districts are invited to apply, waiver requests may not be granted if the plan does not

meet state or local health requirements, or if data show worsening conditions in the community. Some districts may choose not to submit an application if they cannot meet the requirements outlined in local and state guidelines. Middle schools and high schools are not eligible for waivers.

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