

## Julie Enea

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**From:** Stella W <swotherspoon@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 16, 2020 1:32 PM  
**To:** Julie Enea; Supervisor Candace Andersen; Supervisor Mitchoff  
**Cc:** Chris Hsu  
**Subject:** Re: September 17, 2020 Ad-Hoc Committee on Covid-19 Economic Impact and Recovery Agenda Item # 4  
**Attachments:** FAQ 8-10-20 COE-CCHS joint FAQ updated.pdf; CC BOE Cohorts Letter\_20200916.pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear Supervisors Andersen and Mitchoff, CCCoE Superintendent Mackey, and Deputy Director Warne,

My public comment pertains to Contra Costa Health Service (CCHS) guidance to secondary schools regarding the creation of cohorts of students when schools reopen.

**CCHS needs to specifically amend all guidance to secondary schools to include an acceptable maximum number of secondary students in a cohort. At present, the guidance is unacceptably vague.**

In a multitude of documents, CCHS, California Department of Public Health, CalOSHA and Contra Costa Office of Education (CC OoE) have provided guidance on public health measures to implement before reopening schools. All present the concept of small, stable cohorts. However, there is inconsistency among these documents in how to create cohorts. The myriad documents also do not make it clear if creating cohorts holds greater priority than a school's competing preferences or priorities.

Most of the guidance on cohorts includes the phrase, "to the extent practicable". The text is not clear if this means only to the extent that the *physical* space allows small groups. This is my interpretation, based on the context of surrounding texts.

For example, On August 10, 2020, CCHS and CC OoE provided guidance to schools on public health measures to implement before reopening schools. This document is not included in the attachments for this agenda item, but it is attached. It can be obtained on the CC OoE website.

[https://www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_1077313/File/FAQ%208-10-20%20COE-CCHS%20joint%20FAQ%20updated.pdf](https://www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1077313/File/FAQ%208-10-20%20COE-CCHS%20joint%20FAQ%20updated.pdf)

The document is "Frequently Asked Questions on Covid-19 and Contra Costa Schools". There are two questions in this FAQ on cohorts: one defines a stable cohort; the other directs schools to maintain cohort separation throughout the school day by using "out-of-the-box thinking":

*"Are all grade levels not allowed to mix cohorts? What about middle and high school?"*

To the extent practicable, cohorts should be maintained. This may require out-of-the box thinking like rotating instructors rather than classes, staggering schedules, or shifting rooms around to limit the distances students may have to travel between rooms. Face coverings and other safety measures become more important when cohorts mix. Those measures include wearing face coverings, physical distancing, and rigorous handwashing. Avoid congregate settings. " (p.4)

The examples of "out-of-the-box thinking" pertain to constraints of physical space and arrangements.

However, my daughter's middle school in the Lafayette School District considered small cohorts, but decided against forming these *for reasons other than physical constraints*.

**A school reopening work group decided that, when evaluating the specific trade-off between establishing stable cohorts and maintaining the full curricular offering, cohorts were too “limiting”. Establishing stable cohorts was, thus, deemed not “practicable”.**

**My daughter’s middle school has established a 7th grade “cohort” of ~68 students. This is a non-exclusive group, meaning that each student has daily, direct contact with other students not in the group of 68. The number of daily, indirect contacts is likely half the entire grade, or 200 students. This does not include teacher contacts. Does CCHS consider 68 students an acceptable cohort size?**

I think the issue is that school districts do not necessarily think of public health first when they read the guidance, “To the extent practicable, cohorts should be maintained.” Our daughter’s middle school decided cohorts were not “practicable” as it was not possible to establish small cohorts because they were incompatible with schedules complicated by elective offerings. Instead, the principal invented a “teaming idea” in which classes are formed mostly as usual, but an attempt is made to increase the number of students who share the same classes. The “teaming idea” leads to 136 distinct classmates in distance learning currently. In a hybrid return-to-school A/B plan the “team” is 68 direct exposures. Because this is a non-exclusive group, though, the indirect exposure is to about 200. **The school thought of curriculum first, public health second. This interpretation cannot be allowed during a pandemic.**

I believe the intent of this guidance is that schools establish cohorts *unless* there are insurmountable facilities or staffing barriers. I do not believe a principal’s desire to not limit the full curricular offering is a practical consideration under this guidance.

If CCHS defines an acceptable maximum cohort size for middle and high schools, it will force schools to work within this public health-driven framework. As it stands now, some schools see the guidance as simply a suggestion to create stable cohorts.

Lafayette School District has repeatedly said that it looks to CCHS for guidance in all public health matters. Accordingly, CCHS guidance to schools has to be clear, unambiguous and not open to interpretation.

I am sure CCHS has been tracking the scientific and medical research that has pointed to middle and high school students having risk of Covid-19 infection and transmission closer to that of college students and young adults. This is why it is especially important to define an acceptable upper limit on secondary education cohort sizes.

**Last, I request that CCHS require all schools to submit re-opening plans for approval, such as those required for primary school waivers, prior to starting in-person instruction. Schools should be required to share these plans publicly. Parents have a right to know the detailed risk reduction plan for their children’s school.**

Very truly yours,

Stella Wotherspoon & Christopher Hsu  
Stanley Middle School (Lafayette School District) Parents

Attachments:

CCHS and Contra Costa Office of Education, “Frequently Asked Questions on Covid-19 and Contra Costa Schools”, August 10, 2020  
A PDF version of this letter



This guidance is in accordance with current health orders from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS). It is important to note that there will undoubtedly be continued community spread of COVID-19 well into the fall. The goal is to have practical recommendations in place to minimize risk while still allowing for in-class learning to resume.

Districts should seek guidance from CCHS to address unique circumstances. Responses will be modified by CCHS and CCCOE based on new guidance or directives from state agencies. The Contra Costa County Office of Education will continue to work closely with Contra Costa Health Services regarding the timing for reopening schools.

[The California Department of Education also recently released its document “Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California’s Public Schools.”](#) This document also contains valuable information, resources and recommendations regarding the safe reopening of schools and addresses many of the questions listed below.

Please visit [www.cchealth.org/coronavirus](http://www.cchealth.org/coronavirus) for more local health information and guidance regarding COVID-19.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions COVID-19 and Contra Costa County Schools - Updated August 10,2020 -**

### **Screening, Testing, Symptom Checking:**

#### **If someone develops symptoms at school that could be COVID-19, what needs to happen?**

Students who develop symptoms of illness while at school should be separated from others right away, preferably isolated in an area through which others do not enter or pass. If more than one student is in an isolation area, ensure physical distancing.

Any students or staff exhibiting symptoms should immediately don a face covering and wait in an isolation area until they can be transported home or to a healthcare facility. Isolated students should receive continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult.

There is no need for others who had contact with the sick person to quarantine themselves while waiting for results of the test.

#### **If a student or teacher tests positive, with or without symptoms, will we need to close a class or an entire school?**

Not necessarily. Next steps are determined on a case-by-case basis.

CCHS will conduct contact tracing to determine who, if anyone, may have had close contact with the person who tested positive and will provide guidance to the school, including whether a school or class closure is recommended.

Whenever a positive case is confirmed on campus, the school should perform a thorough cleaning of areas where the person spent time, especially high-contact surfaces.

**What qualifies as a “close contact” with a person who has COVID-19?**

A person is considered to have had close contact if they were within six feet of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes.

During the contact tracing process, CCHS will work with the person who tested positive to determine who, if anyone, had close contact, and will communicate directly with them.

**Should schools take attendance for both students AND staff?**

Yes, all schools and school facilities should have a process in place for attendance collection of everyone present, every day. This is critical if the need for contact tracing arises.

**Will students and adults entering campuses be screened for symptoms?**

Temperature screening at school is optional. Schools may implement their own screening measures for students and adults entering campus, however doing so would likely be challenging to implement, especially for larger schools. For symptom screening guidelines, refer to the Centers for Disease & Control’s [Symptoms of Coronavirus page](#).

**Is the process for testing children different from adults?**

The process for testing children is the same as it is for adults. Community testing is available for both children and adults. Talk to your healthcare provider, or call 1-844-421-0804 to make a fast, convenient appointment at no cost to you at a county testing site.

**When should I consider getting a COVID-19 test for myself or my child?**

CCHS recommends a COVID-19 test for anyone who believes they may need one, whether or not they have symptoms. People who have symptoms of illness are encouraged to get tested. Visit [coronavirus.cchealth.org/get-tested](https://coronavirus.cchealth.org/get-tested) to learn more about testing in Contra Costa County.

**Personal Protective Equipment:**

**Will students and adults wear face coverings?**

It is encouraged that all staff use cloth face coverings unless Cal/OSHA standards require respiratory protection. Teachers can use face shields, if available, which enable younger students to see their teachers’ faces and to avoid potential barriers to phonological instruction.

Students should be encouraged to use cloth face coverings. Cloth face coverings are most essential in settings where physical distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Face coverings may be challenging for students (especially younger students) to wear in all-day settings such as school.

Students and staff should be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash their hands frequently. Information should be provided to staff, students and students' families on the proper use, removal and washing of cloth face coverings.

**Are transparent face shields recommended?**

Yes, transparent face shields are fully supported for use by staff members depending on availability. Face shields should also be cleaned and sanitized daily.

**What Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is needed (e.g., face coverings, thermometers) for each campus?**

If physical distancing is unattainable and face coverings are needed, it is recommended that schools provide face coverings, if feasible. If face coverings cannot be provided, staff and students should refer to the Surgeon General's instructions on how to make face coverings.

Schools should have a non-contact temporal or external thermometer to detect fever in students or staff who become ill after arriving at school. Handwashing stations with soap and/or fragrance-free, 60% ethyl alcohol hand sanitizer should be made available in classrooms and other areas where staff/students are likely to be present. Any student under the age of 9 should be supervised when using hand sanitizer.

**What supplies should be included in every classroom and general area (e.g., office, cafeteria, bathroom) for use by students and employees?**

All sinks should have soap. Handwashing stations with soap and/or hand sanitizer should be available in all classrooms and other commonly used areas. Classrooms should have a supply of face coverings for use.

**Are gloves recommended for students and adults?**

Gloves are not recommended for use by students or staff, except those conducting duties such as cleaning, first aid, or food service.

**Will the state provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to all schools and school districts?**

The state has indicated it will provide PPE to local schools and districts.

**Physical Distancing:**

**What are the physical distancing protocols (distance, number permitted in a group) in multiple settings: in classroom, hallways, common outdoor spaces?**

Where practicable, physical distancing of at least four to six feet should be maintained between students within a classroom or instructional area; at least six feet should be maintained between adults and students.

Depending on grade level, physical space, and class sizes, schools could consider the following strategies, where possible and appropriate:

- Minimize contact at school between students, staff, families and the community at the beginning and end of the school day
- Keep each child's belongings separated and in individually labeled storage containers, cubbies or areas
- Ensure adequate supplies to minimize the sharing of high-touch materials (art supplies, equipment, etc.) to the extent practicable or limit the use of supplies and equipment to one group of children at a time and clean and disinfect between uses
- Avoid sharing electronic devices, clothing, toys, books, and other games or learning aids as much as practicable

**What is the recommended number of students in a class based on student age and room size?**

The number of students per classroom will depend on room size and furniture configuration. Schools will likely need to assess their physical spaces and determine capacity accordingly.

**Do schools need to close or limit access to common outdoor spaces?**

Common outdoor spaces may present less risk of transmission than indoor spaces, assuming students and adults maintain physical distancing. Schools may consider staggering recesses and/or outdoor time so that smaller groups are using shared spaces at one time.

When using outdoor spaces, cohorts should be maintained whenever possible. Contact sports and activities that encourage close contact should be avoided.

**What are the recommendations on how to configure the campus to include a space to isolate people who become ill at school? Are there possible campus configurations to designate an 'area' or safe place where students can wait to be picked up, if they are showing signs of COVID-19?**

When feasible, identify a "sick room" through which others do not regularly pass where symptomatic individuals can remain until they are able to go home.

**If more than one student is sick at school, can they isolate in the same area until they are picked up?**

Ideally the school nurse or other adult should separate them as much as possible.

**Are all adults and adult volunteers (parents) excluded from campus?**

Not necessarily. Schools should decide based on what makes sense at the site, observing prevention principles such as maintaining cohort groups, physical distancing and hygiene.

**Will students and staff be allowed to bring backpacks and personal items to and from school?**

Yes. While items transferred back and forth between environments do have some potential to introduce viruses, there is little evidence that transmission of COVID-19 from fomites (objects or materials) is a significant risk.

To the extent practicable, schools could provide options or solutions like allowing students to keep materials at home or leveraging distance learning resources as much as possible.

### **School Schedules and Cohort Groups:**

#### **Should we consider starting the school year earlier or later than our Board adopted calendar?**

It is encouraged that school calendars be informed by engaging with stakeholders and bargaining units. When to start school is a local decision. Starting the school year later is not recommended. It is unlikely that the benefits of starting later will be realized considering COVID-19 will continue to be in our community and some measures for physical distancing will be required. Students have likely experienced learning loss during this time and extending the summer will likely continue to add to this.

#### **What is the recommended number of students in a class based on student age and room size?**

The number of students per classroom will depend on room size and furniture configuration. Schools will likely need to assess their physical spaces and determine capacity accordingly.

#### **What is meant by stable cohorts?**

Stable cohorts represent a group of students and staff members staying together through the course of a day to eliminate or limit the mixing of students and staff in classes or congregate settings. Stable cohorts restrict the ability of a virus to spread beyond the cohort and allow for quicker more efficient tracing in the event a student or staff member contracts a virus. Consideration should be given to not only how stable cohorts can be maintained in the classroom but also the ability to keep these students together at lunch or during break times.

#### **Are all grade levels not allowed to mix cohorts? What about middle and high school?**

To the extent practicable, cohorts should be maintained. This may require out-of-the box thinking like rotating instructors rather than classes, staggering schedules, or shifting rooms around to limit the distances students may have to travel between rooms. Face coverings and other safety measures become more important when cohorts mix. Those measures include wearing face coverings, physical distancing, and rigorous handwashing. Avoid congregate settings.

#### **Should schools stagger arrival and pick up times?**

Staggered arrivals can aid in a school's ability to maintain physical distancing. If administering temperature checks this could support the completion of these checks in a timely manner.

#### **Can schools bring students in for testing on a one to one basis?**

Yes, students can be brought in for testing and assessments. Please be sure to follow guidance for physical distancing, masking, etc.

#### **Can schools bring students together in small groups/ pods for SAT testing?**

Yes, schools can bring students together in small groups/ pods for SAT or similar testing. Please be sure to follow guidance for physical distancing, masking, etc.

### **Transportation:**

#### **What safety measures will need to be in place for bus drivers and students?**

To lower the risk of exposure, districts may implement the following:

- Staff should be wearing face coverings
- Students should be encouraged to use cloth face coverings and avoid touching their faces
- When possible, space students out on buses
- Windows may be open for better ventilation
- Families will be encouraged to sit together
- Physical distancing when getting on/off the bus will be required

### **Reopening and Course Offerings:**

#### **What sports and extracurricular activities can be offered?**

Currently no contact activities are permitted, including sports or other extracurricular activities that involve the potential of person-to-person physical contact. These may be some of the last restrictions to be lifted because of the high-risk nature. Regarding performing arts activities, there are similar concerns. Because of the airborne nature of the virus, choral and wind instrument groups are not allowed to gather unless conducted outdoors with proper physical distancing. As the school year grows closer, the California Department of Public Health, California Department of Education, and/or California Interscholastic Federation may provide specific guidance on this issue.

### **Reporting/Health Protocols/Communication:**

#### **What is the protocol for handling students or staff exhibiting symptoms?**

Students or staff who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should not come to school. If they begin exhibiting symptoms after arriving at school, separate the individual from others as much as possible and make arrangements for the individual to go home as soon as possible. When feasible, identify a “sick room” through which others do not regularly pass where symptomatic individuals can remain until they are able to go home. Procedures should be established to arrange for safe transport home or to a healthcare facility, as appropriate.

#### **What are the expected reporting procedures with Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS)? What are the procedures for referring, tracing, and isolating students and staff with symptoms or diagnosis?**

CCHS has procedures in place for investigating communicable disease cases. CCHS staff will conduct contact tracing using classroom rosters and information obtained from school personnel through interviews and in coordination with school officials.

#### **What are the communication guidelines when a positive case is confirmed?**



Communication recommendations will vary depending on the specific circumstances of a case in a school community. At a minimum, the affected cohort will need to be notified. Media is handled in coordination between the school public information officer and the CCHS public information officer.

**Will staff or students, diagnosed with COVID-19 need a document to return to school?**

No. But someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 should isolate at home for at least 10 days, plus three days after symptoms subside.

**If a parent is diagnosed with COVID-19 will their student need to self-quarantine prior to returning to school? How will the schools know when the student is ok to return?**

If a student or staff has a household member that tests positive for COVID-19, the student will be ordered to quarantine at home until 14 days have elapsed since all household members are no longer considered infectious. CCHS may issue an order with explicit [instructions on quarantine](#) and details on its expiration. If needed, CCHS will provide clearance letters at the end of isolation/quarantine.

**Health Education:**

**What are the recommended health education topics schools should provide?**

Schools should consider educating students on the importance of healthy hygiene practices, understanding and monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19, physical distancing, and mental health/sources of support.

**Facilities - Safety and Sanitation Considerations:**

**What supplies should be included in every classroom and general area (e.g., office, cafeteria, bathroom) for use by students and employees?**

All sinks should have soap. Handwashing stations with soap and/or fragrance-free 60% ethyl alcohol hand sanitizer should be made available in classrooms. Face coverings will be encouraged at all times while indoors.

**What are the guidelines for cleaning and sanitation?**

Schools will follow disinfection guidelines for classrooms, offices, and outdoor spaces that include the following:

- Consider suspending or modifying the use of site resources that necessitate sharing or touching items
- Staff should clean and disinfect frequently high-touched surfaces within the school and on school buses at least daily and, as practicable, frequently throughout the day
- Buses should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected daily, and after transporting any individual who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19
- Limit the use of shared playground equipment
- Limit the sharing of objects and equipment, such as toys, games, and art supplies, to the extent practicable. But where allowed, clean and disinfect between uses

- Establish a cleaning and disinfecting schedule
- Ensure proper ventilation during cleaning and disinfecting

**Where might physical barriers need to be installed at school sites and district offices to ensure student and employee safety?**

Schools may want to consider installing clear plexiglass barriers at front counters where physical distancing is not possible, similar to how many retailers have done so at check-out counters. Staff workstations should be arranged so that staff can physically distance.

September 16, 2020

Re: September 17, 2020 Ad-Hoc Committee on Covid-19 Economic Impact and Recovery Agenda Item # 4

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