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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Wolf Administration Updates Recommendations to Help Schools Safely Navigate COVID-19 During Second Semester

Counties in the substantial level recommended to consider blended/hybrid learning for elementary school students

Harrisburg, Pa. - The Pennsylvania departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE) today provided school administrators and school boards with [updated recommendations](#) as to which instructional models they should consider using based on the changing levels of community transmission of COVID-19 in their counties.

Until now, the county designations aligned to three recommended instructional models: fully in-person, blended/hybrid, and fully remote. Starting January 25, the departments are providing a second recommendation for elementary schools in substantial level counties. In addition to remote learning, now there is an option for blended/hybrid learning for elementary students.

Fully remote learning remains recommended for middle and high schools in the substantial level counties. K-12 schools may also consider bringing back targeted student populations for in-person instruction, regardless of what general instructional model they are utilizing.

“The research on offering in-person instruction during COVID-19 continues to emerge,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “While it is impossible to eliminate the risk of disease transmission entirely within a school setting where community spread is present, recent studies have shown that when mitigation efforts, such as universal masking, physical distancing, and hand hygiene are followed, it may be safer for younger children, particularly elementary grade students, to return to in-person instruction.”

These updated recommendations are intended to help schools begin the process of safely returning as many students as possible to in-person instruction during the 2020-21 academic year.

“The commitment our educational leaders have shown towards mitigation efforts is noteworthy and helps us support returning many of our youngest and most vulnerable

students to some level of in-person instruction,” said Acting Secretary Noe Ortega. “We must remember that a safe return to in-person instruction will look different across every school and county depending on a variety of local factors.”

Each week, DOH designates counties as having a low, moderate, or substantial risk of community transmission based on two standard public health metrics used by public health experts: incidence rate and the percent positivity of diagnostic testing. The metrics for every county in Pennsylvania are available on the DOH [COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard](#). The [metrics and designations](#), which are updated weekly and available on PDE’s website, help school communities make instructional model decisions as conditions related to the pandemic fluctuate. As of Friday, Jan. 1, all 67 counties were in the substantial level.

Since the beginning of the school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has developed and shared [health and safety guidelines, tools, and recommendations](#) with school communities. This information is publicly available on PDE’s website and is used by school leaders to inform local efforts.

Public school entities in counties in the substantial level of community transmission are required to sign an [attestation form](#) affirming that if they are providing any type of in-person instruction, that they are following the DOH face covering order and DOH guidance on how to handle confirmed cases in buildings. All required schools have completed and submitted an attestation form.