



Moving to In-Person Instruction FAQ

Now that we are in the Red Tier, can we return students to school for in-person instruction?

You must first submit your return to in-person instruction plan to San Mateo County Office (SMCOE) and San Mateo County Health (SMCH) review. You can find [information on that process here](#).

When can schools begin to bring back students for in-person learning now that the County is in the Red Tier?

Schools can open campuses to in-person learning once the Return to Campus Plan has been submitted and reviewed by SMCOE and SMC Health. Plans that are complete, clear, and thorough will likely make it through the review process fairly quickly.

What does our plan need to address?

The plan [submission form](#) lists these items, which include clear steps for addressing the items in the Four Pillars, COVID-19 testing for staff, and contact tracing, and describes an incremental approach for bringing students back on campus for in-person learning.

Is this review process unique to San Mateo County?

No, the process is consistent with that of other Bay Area counties and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) directives for schools.

Are we required to follow CDPH guidance if the county is in the Red Tier?

Yes. The guidance applies to all public and private schools operating in California. The term guidance is misleading as it is actually a public health directive and the Governor has ordered, in multiple [executive orders](#), that all California residents heed the guidance and directives of the state public health officer. Schools must also follow guidance provided by San Mateo County Health (SMCH). [CDPH](#) and [SMCH](#) guidance are reflected in the [Pandemic Recovery Framework](#).

How will the county's move to the orange or yellow tier of the Blueprint for a Safer Economy impact schools?

A move to the orange or yellow tier will not impact schools. Schools will continue to follow CDPH and SMCH guidance and the Four Pillars. The county's move to the orange and yellow tier simply allows additional sectors of the economy to open with restrictions.

If a school opens to in-person learning while the county is in the Red Tier, and the county moves back to the Purple Tier, does the school have to close?

No, but it must increase its COVID-19 testing cadence for staff. According to [California Department of Public Health guidance](#) of July 17, “schools should begin testing staff, or increase frequency of staff testing but are not required to close,” if cases or positivity rates increase countywide.

Can we still bring back small groups of students for specialized support if we don’t want to submit a plan to return students for in-person instruction?

Yes, schools that will continue in Distance Learning can still serve students with urgent, higher needs for in-person instruction under the [CDPH’s small group setting guidance](#).

Can schools bring back all of their students for in-person learning at once?

CDPH, SMCH, and SMCOE all recommend an incremental approach to bringing students back for in-person learning. This gives schools time to ramp up and adjust policies and practices as needed. We all want to avoid bringing students back only to send them all home because of the spread of COVID-19 in the school community. An incremental approach gives schools the opportunity to get used to all of the safety procedures required for a safe return to in-person learning. Schools may also consider continuing to offer a distance education option for students who may not be able to return to school for in-person learning.

What if our school already has a waiver approved by the CDPH? Do we need to submit a Return to Campus plan?

If a school already has a waiver approved by the California Department of Public Health and wants to bring back students in additional grade levels (beyond TK-6), they will need to note that on the [request for plan review form](#) and add an addendum to their plan that reflects their proposed changes.

What if our school is currently in the waiver review process?

If a school has already submitted a waiver application, which has not been approved yet, and wants to bring back students in additional grade levels (beyond TK-6), they will need to note that on the [request for plan review form](#) and add an addendum to their plan that reflects their proposed changes.