

Dear Parents,

Getting students successfully back to in-person learning is one of my top priorities as your Governor. Coloradans have endured and suffered greatly over the last ten months. I am deeply committed to preventing our children's education and well-being from becoming yet another casualty of this pandemic. That's why I have convened a Back-to-School working group that included parents, educators, school nurses, local public health officials, and superintendents to help inform a roadmap to getting back to safe in-person learning for the winter/spring semester.

[Please see the full report here](#) on the resources the state has committed to ensure this roadmap can be successfully implemented by every district and school in our state.

What we know ten months into this pandemic is that schools are relatively low-risk environments and can be a safe place for students and educators when they properly implement a layered approach to risk reduction.<sup>1</sup> We also now know that younger students are less susceptible to contracting and spreading the virus<sup>2</sup> and that these are also our students who often struggle the most with remote learning.

Here is how we can operate schools safely and put our children's future and the health of our educators and school staff first:

**Prevention and Protection:**

Knowing we will never achieve a zero-risk environment in any aspect of society, data from around the world continues to demonstrate that classrooms can operate relatively safely when several layers of precautionary measures are successfully implemented. Schools in Colorado should follow these key steps to achieve a layered approach to substantially reduce risk for COVID-19 transmission in school settings:

**1) Prioritize Testing for Schools:**

- a) This should include offering regular screening for educators and staff interested, for symptomatic students, educators, or staff that need a diagnostic test, and for individuals who do not have symptoms but have been quarantined after an exposure.
- b) The state will continue to support more than 50 community-based testing sites where educators, staff, students, and community members can obtain free, quick, and easy COVID-19 testing. This barrier-free testing is available regardless of person's symptoms, address, or ability to pay. The state is committed to extending this program and expanding testing capacity.

**2) Contact Tracing:**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tQ2mlVokJrVr42121MALc9JDBN3s1i8B/view>

<sup>2</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2771181>;

<https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa691/5943164#219065749>

- a) The state and county health departments will support additional capacity for contact tracing for schools, which may include contact tracing resources at the State level.
- 3) **Mask Wearing:**
  - a) A strong recommendation for all children ages 3 and over to wear a mask.
  - b) The state will continue its commitment to provide medical grade masks for educators, including allowing educators to pick a KN 95 mask or surgical mask.
- 4) **Symptom Screening:**
  - a) Schools should utilize evidence-based procedures such as implementing symptom screening in the home setting, as well as strategies for in-school screening when home screening is incomplete.
- 5) **Effective Cohorting:**
  - a) Schools should utilize cohorting and protocols to minimize spread of the virus should there be a positive case.
  - b) If transmission puts counties in Orange, Red, or Purple, they should consider suspending other extracurricular and recreational activities that significantly interfere with cohorting to preserve effective cohorting and minimize disruptions to in-person learning.
- 6) **Social Distancing and Ventilation:**
  - a) Schools should maximize social distancing as much as practical and improve ventilation in learning spaces, including the use of outdoor spaces and outside facing windows remaining open in classrooms.<sup>3</sup> Efforts should be made to maximize physical distancing in classrooms.
- 7) **Hand Washing:**
  - a) Schools should continue to encourage hand washing hygiene, cleaning, and disinfecting with appropriate products known to be effective against SARS-CoV-2.
- 8) **Extracurricular Activities:**
  - a) School sponsored activities such as athletics, music, art, and theatre should only occur once full-time or hybrid in-person learning is successfully occurring with minimal disruptions.
- 9) **Vaccines Prioritization:**
  - a) The State should continue to prioritize educators and school staff in the phased vaccination prioritization.<sup>4</sup>

Ensuring all of our students can return to in-person instruction is not just the responsibility of the Governor, the State, superintendents, or local public health to successfully implement this layered approach to risk mitigation, although that is very important, it is also the responsibility of parents and the community as a whole. Protecting in-person learning means creating a safe environment for educators and students by ensuring everyone does their part to suppress the virus.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oNUhQx2CCwSsMrbSkIOreAN1Yjp62sYd/view>

<sup>4</sup> While immunization is critically important for ending the pandemic, immunization is unlikely to have an impact on schools for the winter/spring semester. Please see <https://covid19.colorado.gov/vaccine>

Here are some key steps to ensure that the schools community can effectively partner with parents and community members to protect in-person learning:

- 1) **Communicate Regularly:** Build a communications plan to ensure educators and parents have access to regularly updated information about disease transmission, emerging research, and best practices to maintain in-person learning. This may include holding virtual town halls where this information is provided and time is allowed for questions and feedback.
- 2) **Prioritize In-Person Learning:** Encourage counties to commit to prioritize in-person learning by considering suspending in-person extracurricular and recreational activities that significantly interfere with cohorting once a county reaches level Orange, Red, or Purple on the COVID-19 dial in order to minimize disruptions.
- 3) **Parent Pledges:** Encourage parents to commit to prioritize in-person learning by wearing masks around others, and suspending optional socializing, non-essential travel and other higher risk behavior when transmission increases. Commit to keeping sick students home and sharing testing results to inform contact tracing.<sup>5</sup>

While these steps are not exhaustive, they are a good roadmap to where we need to go to successfully and safely return to in-person learning across Colorado. The multiple measures work together as layers to make school one of the safest places that students, educators, and staff can be during the day. As always, we are stronger working together to achieve this important goal.

It's an honor to serve as your Governor and I am working every day to put you and your family first so we can rebuild even stronger after this pandemic -- and that starts with protecting our children's future.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Polis  
Governor of Colorado

---

<sup>5</sup> See the pledge for Colorado students here: <https://takethepledgecolorado.org/>.

COVID-19 Dial:

	<b>LEVEL GREEN: PROTECT OUR NEIGHBORS</b>	<b>LEVEL BLUE: CAUTION</b>	<b>LEVEL YELLOW: CONCERN</b>	<b>LEVEL ORANGE: HIGH RISK</b>	<b>LEVEL RED: SEVERE RISK</b>	<b>LEVEL PURPLE: EXTREME RISK</b>
P-12 Schools	In-person	In-person	In-person suggested	In-person suggested  Counties are encouraged to prioritize in-person learning by considering suspending other extracurricular and recreational activities in order to preserve effective cohorting and minimize disruptions to in person learning	P-5: in person suggested  Middle school: in-person, hybrid, or remote suggested  High school: hybrid or remote suggested	In-person, hybrid, or remote as appropriate