



Illinois State Board of Education

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Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

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Dear Colleagues:

The Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education today released [Revised Public Health Guidance for Schools](#). This joint guidance from ISBE and IDPH makes important updates to the essential, layered mitigation strategies that facilitate the safe return to in-person instruction. This updated joint guidance prevails in the event that any of it is in conflict with guidance previously issued by IDPH and ISBE. It reflects what we have learned about the transmission of COVID-19 in school settings, as more students in Illinois and across the country have returned safely to in-person learning during the 2020-21 school year. **This joint guidance supports the return to in-person instruction as soon as practicable in each community.**

The Revised Public Health Guidance for Schools is precipitated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recently released and updated guidance that reinforces that schools are an important part of community infrastructure, that in-person instruction promotes learning recovery along with the well-being of students and families, and that schools therefore "should be the last settings to close ... and the first to reopen when they can do so safely."

Regardless of the level of community transmission, all schools must use and layer the following five essential mitigation strategies that are key to safely delivering in-person instruction and mitigating COVID-19 transmission in schools:

1. Require universal and correct use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including face masks;
2. Require social distancing be observed, as much as possible;
3. Require contact tracing in combination with isolation of those with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and quarantine of close contacts, in collaboration with the local health department;
4. Require an increase in schoolwide cleaning and disinfection and maintenance of healthy environments; and
5. Require promotion and adherence to handwashing and respiratory etiquette.

In-person instruction should be prioritized over extracurricular activities, including sports and school events, to minimize risk of transmission in schools and protect in-person learning. Toward this goal, capacity limits for in-person learning, including non-academic school hour activities such as lunch, are now determined by the space's ability to accommodate social distancing, and not a set capacity limit number or percentage. Bus capacity remains at no more than 50 people per bus.

Additionally, IDPH is revising the recommendation for social distancing for in-person learning. Social distance for in-person learning is now defined as 3 to 6 feet for students and fully vaccinated staff. Maintaining 6 feet remains the safest distance, but schools can operate at no less than 3 feet in order to provide in-person learning. Unvaccinated staff should maintain 6 feet social distance as much as possible because adults remain more susceptible to infection than children. Strict adherence to social distancing must be maintained when face masks are removed in limited situations and monitored by school staff.

Further, IDPH and the CDC no longer recommend symptom screenings on the school grounds, but schools may continue this practice if preferred. Schools and districts should require self-certification and verification for all staff, students, and visitors prior to entering school buildings.

Consistent with the updated guidance from the CDC, families of students who are at increased risk of severe illness (including those with special health care needs) or who live with people at increased risk must be given the option of remote instruction.

The past year has been a long, challenging road for all of us. In March of last year is when we had to make the difficult decision to suspend in-person instruction statewide. One year later, I am grateful and encouraged to see us rounding the corner. Day by day, more and more districts on our [COVID-19 dashboard](#) move into the hybrid and in-person learning columns. More and more teachers are receiving the vaccine, and our positivity rates are below 3 percent. Everyone who works in our schools – you are all heroes for leading us through this pandemic. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education