



July 14, 2020

Amendment #1: 2020-2021 School Year Planning: A Guide to Address the Challenges of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the statewide closure of school campuses earlier this year and created an unprecedented challenge to local schools as they continued to provide an education and other services to students and their families in San Joaquin County. After campuses closed on March 16, schools and districts within San Joaquin County moved to a distance learning model.

In order to provide guidance and support to educational leaders preparing to begin the new academic year, the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) and San Joaquin County Public Health Services (SJCPHS) developed a planning document in collaboration with superintendents from San Joaquin County's 14 school districts, that was published on June 17, 2020.

Aligned with recommendations from the California Department of Public Health and approved by the San Joaquin County Public Health Officer, the [2020-2021 School Year Planning: A Guide to Address the Challenges of COVID-19](#) was based on the best available information about COVID-19 in the county at the time of its development and publication. The guidance in the document was subject to revision as circumstances related to COVID-19 changed.

Understanding the virus and its local community spread is essential when planning for the reopening of schools. In recent weeks, the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has increased in the country and in California. In San Joaquin County, the number of positive cases and increases in hospitalizations have been a cause of concern. By July 13, the number of positive cases in San Joaquin County had risen to 6,988 and intensive care units in local hospitals were at 121% capacity.

The SJCOE is issuing this July 14, 2020, Guidance Amendment #1 to reflect the recent changes in circumstances. This Guidance Amendment was developed in collaboration with local school leaders and approved by the San Joaquin County Public Health Officer.

The original guidance document published on June 17 states that students may return to school campuses on a five-day-a-week schedule while following safety protocols and other scheduling options providing in-classroom instruction. (Page 8: Instructional Scheduling Options).

However, due to the significant evidence of community spread in San Joaquin County, the SJCOE and SJCPHS are now recommending that local schools begin the new school year providing only distance learning instruction to students through at least the end of August 2020. Based on the direction of districts and schools, staff may report to classrooms or school sites to



provide or support distance learning as well as perform other job duties. All necessary physical distancing and safety measures should be implemented for staff that return to campus.

The SJCOE will review the recommendations in Guidance Amendment #1 with the San Joaquin County Public Health Officer in mid-August to determine if the situation has improved enough for schools to begin to offer a modified form of in-person instruction in September.

James Mousalimas, San Joaquin County Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. Maggie Park, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer, [released a joint statement about this recommendation](#) on July 13, 2020.

Education is an essential service in our community, and it remains our firm belief that our children are best served by a return to as much in-person instruction as possible. Beyond the increased educational opportunities that come with being physically in a classroom, children also learn social-emotional skills and receive other supports and benefits from being at school. However, any return to in-person instruction must be guided by the evolving scientific understanding of COVID-19 and the facts of its spread in San Joaquin County. This is why it is important that our school leaders and health experts continue to work together to protect the health and safety of students, staff, and all our communities.