



AIR QUALITY PROTOCOL Frequently Asked Questions

(scroll to the bottom of this document for information on Air Quality and COVID)

Introduction

In today's California large-scale fires that leave a path of destruction on communities are becoming more common. Even when fires burn hundreds of miles away, the impact on the air here in the Bay Area can be felt for days, sometimes weeks.

HCSD has developed these FAQs during COVID-19 to help guide a parent's understanding of our district's response to poor air quality. HCSD reserves the right to update this FAQ and its protocol if and when reliable information would necessitate changes.

What resources does HCSD use to make decisions about air quality and our response?

HCSD, along with all school districts in San Mateo County, uses two sources to track air quality: the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website, [AirNow.gov](https://airnow.gov), and Bay Area Air Quality Management District, [BAAQMD.gov](https://bbaqmd.gov). With the advice of the County Health Department, we use these sources because they are calibrated and regulated. Other popular websites are not currently calibrated and regulated, resulting in less reliable readings. We encourage parents and community members to use AirNow and BAAQMD. The San Mateo County Office of Education also has a [link](#) on its website with additional information.

When Students are ON-CAMPUS

At what point will HCSD keep students indoors due to air quality concerns?

HCSD uses Air Quality Index (AQI) numbers from AirNow and/or BAAQMD, [The Air Quality and Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools](#) as well as [The School Air Quality Activity Recommendations](#) to determine the appropriate activities based on the Air Quality Index (AQI)

- When AQI levels reach 101-150 (Orange Level or Level 3), "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups," only students with a specific restriction regarding air quality will be kept inside during recess, lunch or PE. All other students may still



participate in outdoor activities. Teachers will use discretion in holding class outdoors based on the health sensitivities of students in their class.

- When the AQI levels reach 151- 500 (Red Level or Above), “Unhealthy,” “Very Unhealthy,” or “Hazardous,” we will hold recess inside the classrooms and outdoor learning will not take place. We will move to our [Shelter in Place Protocol](#). (**See the last section of this document for information on COVID and air quality).
- During “Shelter in Place,” students and staff may move freely inside buildings following all directional signage, and teaching and work continues. Recess and outdoor activities will be canceled or held indoors; movement outside between buildings is okay. Staff should close doors and windows; shut down the classroom/building heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to prevent exposure to the outside air and should turn on air purifiers. **“Shelter in Place” may be modified depending on the air quality level.**

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Numerical Value
Good	0 to 50
Moderate	51 to 100
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101 to 150
Unhealthy	151 to 200
Very Unhealthy	201 to 300
Hazardous	301 to 500

*Note: Values above 500 are considered Beyond the AQI.
Follow recommendations for the "Hazardous category." See additional information on [reducing exposure to extremely high levels of particle pollution](#).*

How does HCSD monitor students who are considered a “sensitive group?”

HCSD refers to the [Educational Resources](#) from the Environmental Protection Agency



(EPA) to inform our decisions for caring for students who have asthma and/or other respiratory health concerns. Each school knows which students have health concerns.

What steps can parents take to support their child during poor air quality?

Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about air quality concerns. Being in conversation with your child and referring to facts helps reduce confusion. Other steps parents can take include:

- Remind children to drink plenty of water.
- Remind students to report symptoms including coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, and chest tightness. If symptoms occur, your child might need to take a break, do a less intense activity, stop all activity, go indoors, or use quick-relief medicine as prescribed. If symptoms don't improve, consult your physician.
- Rather than walking or biking to school, children should be transported via private transportation.
- If the weather is cold, send your child to school with long pants and a heavy coat or jacket in case the HVAC system is turned off. Conversely, if warm, please encourage students to dress comfortably.

Can parents keep their children home during periods of poor air quality and will the absence be excused?

YES, parents who wish to keep their children home and have the ability to do so are supported in making that call. The absence will be excused and students will be responsible for making up the work they miss.

Under what conditions and when will HCSD schools be closed due to poor air quality?

The [San Mateo County Health Department](#) (SMCHD) and the [Bay Area Air Quality Management District](#) (BAAQMD) are clear that there exists no established number that would indicate the need to close schools. Our school district will rely on the direction of SMCHD and BAAQMD to determine the need for school closure. Should these two organizations recommend closure, HCSD will close schools. No universal Air Quality Index (AQI) measure exists above which schools should close so a decision will be made regarding school closures depending on factors impeding teaching and learning.



Where can parents go to find the latest information from HCSD regarding air quality and school closures?

HCSD sends out communications to parents and staff via email and Blackboard. It is essential that parents and staff update their email and phone contact information through their school Administrative Assistant when contact information changes.

To whom should parents and staff direct questions or provide input regarding air quality and school closures?

Site administrators are ready and available to answer any questions regarding air quality, school protocols, and safety. Your first step should be an email to your school site administration.

Keith Rocha, Principal, Crocker Middle School	krocha@hcsdk8.org
Lina Butte, Principal, South School	lbutte@hcsdk8.org
Heidi Felt, Principal, North School	hfelt@hcsdk8.org
Heather Mata, Principal, West School	hmata@hcsdk8.org

Hillsborough Recreation (HREC) Protocols Regarding Air Quality and After School Sports

Please [CLICK on THIS LINK](#) to review Hillsborough Recreation's Air Quality Protocols for after school outdoor activities.

Air Quality and COVID-19

**HCSD follows the San Mateo County Office of Education and Health Department's [COVID-19 Safe Schools Framework](#) guidance on school safety during COVID. The framework affirms that upgraded ventilation systems with MERV 13 filters and classroom portable HEPA filters (HCSD has both) are sufficient to clean the air and keep students and staff safe even when doors and windows are shut and ventilation systems are recirculating the indoor air, due to poor air quality. HCSD will follow the guidelines for poor air quality, keeping schools open, in alignment with the district's air quality protocols.