

EDUCATION

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Wolf Administration Outlines Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Schools

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) today said elementary and secondary schools in the state’s yellow and green phases may resume in-person instruction and activities beginning July 1 under a phased reopening approach that first requires schools to develop health and safety plans based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the state Department of Health (DOH).

PDE also released guidance that allows postsecondary institutions and adult basic education programs, effective June 5, to begin in-person instruction immediately following the development of a health and safety plan outlining strategies for safe operations.

The preliminary documents follow Governor Wolf’s Process to Reopen Pennsylvania, which has been updated to reflect the new guidance.

“The Wolf administration remains committed to the safety and welfare of students, faculty and staff, and any reopening plan must be rooted in these principles,” said Secretary of Education Pedro A. Rivera. “As school leaders resume instruction in the 2020-21 school year, the department recognizes the need for preliminary guidance to aid in planning for a return to in-person instruction, delivery of services, and resumption of extracurricular activities.”

Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic, the preliminary guidance serves as a starting point for school leaders to consider in reopening preparations, and it will continue to evolve as further research, data and resources become available. Later this month, PDE will release additional guidance that outlines steps for school openings while addressing safe operations, teaching and learning and student wellness – with attention to equity throughout.

The two guidance documents released today provide a list of decisions that schools need to consider prior to reopening.

Elementary and secondary schools that want to begin offering in-person instruction or activities must first develop a health and safety plan, which will serve as a local guideline for all school opening activities. The plans should be tailored to the unique needs of each school and reflect a comprehensive, community approach created in consultation with local health agencies.

Plans must encompass several elements, including identifying a pandemic coordinator or team to lead response efforts; steps to protect high-risk children and staff who may be at higher risk; processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms; guidelines for hygiene practices; processes for cleaning and disinfecting; guidelines for the use of face masks; protocols for social distancing; and procedures for restricting large gatherings.

The plans must be approved by local boards of directors and posted on the school or district public website before a school reopens. The plans must also be submitted to PDE.

The guidance applies to school districts, charter schools, regional charter schools, cyber charter schools, career and technical centers and intermediate units. Nonpublic schools are strongly encouraged to create plans tailored to their unique needs and post them on their websites.

Finally, postsecondary schools in the yellow and green phases can resume in-person instruction effective June 5 and following the development of a health and safety plan. The guidance applies to colleges, universities, seminaries, trade schools and adult basic education programs. Institutions must adhere to proper physical distancing guidelines and other general public health and safety considerations informed by guidelines released by the CDC and DOH.

“Educators, students and caregivers have done a remarkable job as we all navigate through this pandemic,” added Secretary Rivera. “Now we need to direct our energy to focus on how to resume instruction in the 2020-21 school year. We fully expect students to return to classrooms in some capacity and are confident that schools will use this guidance to build a framework that best meets the unique needs of their students and communities.”

For the latest information for individuals, families, businesses and schools, visit “Responding to COVID-19” on [pa.gov](https://www.pa.gov).

For more information about Pennsylvania’s education policies and programs, please visit the [Department of Education’s website](https://www.pde.pa.gov) or follow PDE on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pdepa), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/pdepa), or [Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com/pdepa).