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A Message from the El Dorado County Superintendent of Schools, the El Dorado County Chief Administrative Officer, and the El Dorado County Public Health Officer

Since the onset of COVID-19, and over the last four months, El Dorado County's 15 School District Superintendents and Dr. Ed Manansala, County Superintendent of Schools, have been working in close collaboration with Dr. Nancy Williams, El Dorado County Public Health Officer. The superintendents' primary goal has been to return students to in-person instruction in a manner that is safe for students, families, and educators.

On Friday, July 17, 2020, in addition to issuing new industry guidance for operation of schools, Governor Newsom and State Health Officer Sonia Angell jointly introduced criteria from the California Department of Public Health for opening schools, COVID-19 and Reopening In-Person Learning Framework for K-12 Schools in California, 2020-2021 School Year. Counties that were not on the State's watch list could open school in accordance with the industry guidance. Dr. Williams has provided Superintendents with data on the increase of community spread of the coronavirus that may place El Dorado County on the watch list over the next several weeks.

School districts across the state, working collaboratively with County Public Health Departments, are now faced with very difficult decisions relative to identifying how to provide education services.

The reopening framework document states that, "Recommendations regarding in-person school reopening and closure should be based on the available evidence as well state and local disease trends." "Evidence" refers to the growing body of knowledge about variations in COVID-19 effects by age and the effectiveness of disease control and mitigation strategies. The strength of evidence is growing in support of the following key findings:

- Preventive measures (e.g., physical distancing, use of face coverings, and limiting contact with others outside one's own household, and staying away from other people when ill or after having been exposed to others infected with COVID-19) are effective in preventing COVID-19 transmission.
- Young children are less likely to acquire infection, or have severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection than older children, who are in turn at less risk than adults.

It is incumbent on schools to ensure the prompt identification and isolation of ill persons. Testing of those symptomatic people is an important step that can help limit the need for quarantine to just the people whom we learn were exposed to actual cases of illness. In the

event of a positive test, it will then be incumbent on schools to assist Public Health in ensuring full cooperation relative to contact tracing efforts.

Public Health also recommends robust self-screening before students and staff come to school. Parents should screen children daily, and anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 must not come on a school campus. These screenings can potentially further reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting.

While robust testing improves detection of cases, it does not replace the preventive measures noted above. Indeed, testing capacity is but one factor to be considered in evaluating the ability to safely reopen schools for in-person learning pursuant to CDPH guidelines. Nevertheless, the current delays in receiving test results throughout California is concerning and complicates the decision-making process about whether or when to reopen schools for in-person learning. Based on current limited testing capacity and response time, dependent on local data, some school districts may open with priority given to elementary aged instruction, per state and national guidelines.

To address this concern, El Dorado County Public Health intends to facilitate the following:

- With the assistance of schools, continue the practice of robust case investigations and contact tracing.
- Create the process by which symptomatic persons identified as having potentially exposed others at school to be prioritized for both specimen testing and for specimen processing, to get test results as soon as possible.
- Pursue the possibility of arranging for prompt specimen collection and laboratory processing from new laboratory provider(s) to perform the testing specifically for El Dorado County schools.
- Work with EDCOE and local districts to develop the logistics for testing teachers and staff.
- Continue to monitor disease trends and hospital capacity closely and share status updates with school district leaders.

In conclusion, El Dorado County Public Health will continue to offer assessments of the health-related aspects of the pandemic, educate stakeholders on best practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and provide assistance with obtaining resources. The decision to reopen schools for in class instruction or distance learning is one that will need to be made by each local school district based on their analysis and expertise of the overall risks and impacts to children.



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