



Department of Public Health

August 31, 2020

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CITY MANAGER

Tommy Gonzalez

To: Independent and Private School Districts Superintendents
From: Hector I. Ocaranza, MD, MPH-Local Health Authority
RE: Situation Update for Schools Re-opening for School Year 2020-2021 (August 28, 2020)

As part of our commitment to provide support and guidance to all school districts, public and private, and unincorporated schools in El Paso County for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year, the City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) is issuing the following situational update on the COVID-19 pandemic in our community.

As stated earlier on, there is not a single parameter offering a high degree of certainty on the right time to safely re-open schools for in-person instruction. On a threshold letter issued on 08/05/2020 we set forth a combination of parameters that provided a more objective picture on the current status of the pandemic.

The parameters previously stated have shown a continuous downward trend in the pandemic indicating that the spread of COVID-19 in our community has slowed down to a level that can be considered as an indicator for return of in-person instruction on campus, on a safe and cautious manner, on or after September 8, 2020.

The current status of the parameters for COVID-19 pandemic in our community are as follows:

- 7-day Rolling Average Cases Per Capita: 11.9 cases per 100,000
- Testing Positivity Rate at CDC Week 34: Less than 6.3%
- More than 14-day downward trend and decline in the 7-day rolling average of positive cases

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven unpredictable and highly dynamic, posing challenges at different levels of planning, response, and mitigation efforts. Nonetheless, while the safety plans developed and improved by schools provide a solid foundation for safe return to in-person instruction, it is important for said plans to remain flexible and open for revisions, as needed.

Angela Mora – Interim Public Health Director

Department of Public Health | 5115 El Paso Dr. | El Paso, TX 79905

O: (915) 212-6564 | Email: Angela.Mora@elpasotexas.gov





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We understand that each school district has tailored their plans taking into consideration elements such as safety and minimum risk and a safe on campus environment for their students, faculty and staff. We strongly recommend the integration of following three elements as the supporting pillars of every school plan:

- **Face mask/covering:** It should be required for children 2 years and older with very few exceptions (as recommended by their primary care provider).
- **Physical Distancing:** Re-arrange classrooms to promote safe distancing between students. Promote distancing between faculty and staff. Separate and return home those who are sick or become sick while at school.
- **Hygiene:** Promote proper hygiene practices such as handwashing, or use of sanitizer when handwashing is not feasible; covering cough and disposing of used tissues properly, etc.

More evidence-based guidance and recommendations will be provided as they become available. Rest assured that the DPH will stand by its commitment to preserve health by partnering with institutions such as yours.

Respectfully,

Hector I. Ocaranza, MD, MPH, FAAP
Health Authority City and County of El Paso, TX

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