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Sonoma County:

Barbie Robinson, Dept. of Health Services Director
Sundari R. Mase, MD, MPH, Health Officer

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Bay Area Health Officers Support Full In-person School this Fall

The Bay Area Health Officers representing the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and the city of Berkeley support the opening of California schools for full time in-person instruction for all grades in the fall of 2021.

The lack of in-person learning has disrupted education, weakened the social supports provided by school communities, negatively impacted mental health, and prevented participation in the rituals and shared milestones that tie our communities together.

Since March of last year, Bay Area health officers and local health departments have been working with county offices of education, school districts, superintendents, and other leaders on how best to provide for the safety of everyone in the education community.

Public health researchers, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the California Department of Public Health, and local health departments have learned from the research and the experiences of classroom instruction from the fall of 2020 through the winter and spring of 2021. The science is now clear that the risk of transmission among children wearing masks is very low, even with reduced spacing between desks.

In the Bay Area and throughout the state, many factors indicate that the consequences and risk of classroom transmission were low to begin with and have decreased even further as community case rates have fallen. There are high rates of vaccination among people at increased risk of severe disease – including older adults and those with high risk of medical complications. Children 12 and older are now eligible for vaccinations, and there is low overall community prevalence.

The California Department of Public Health's reopening framework for schools offers guidelines for limiting the spread of infection and requirements for face covering, basic cleaning, enhanced ventilation, and

other measures to facilitate a safe return to in-person instruction. Many schools have implemented these practices and brought students and teachers back to campus.

The governor has announced plans to end the tier system on June 15 and fully reopen California's economy, as long as vaccine supply remains sufficient to meet demand and hospitalization rates are stable and low.

“Students, parents, teachers, coaches – and their families – deserve our thanks for the considerable sacrifices they have made,” said Dr. Sundari Mase, Health Officer and Public Health Division Director of Sonoma County. “It’s time to move past the remote-learning model and back to the full range of learning and support that our educational communities provide.”

The Bay Area health officers urge school administrators, teachers, and parents to work together now to plan for full classrooms for all grades in the fall.

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The Local Health Jurisdictions joining this statement are the Counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano and the City of Berkeley.