**Pennsylvania revises school reopening guidelines**

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Shane Dunlap | Tribune-Review

Floor placements indicating social distancing in front of student lockers at Pittsburgh Public Schools’ Lincoln PreK-5 Elementary as the school district prepares for in-person classes.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Health on Monday announced new recommendations for schools — suggesting most should reopen for some degree of face-to-face instruction.

The new recommendations bring the state into alignment with recent guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which in mid-March made a number of changes and clarifications to guidelines related to social distancing, ventilation, community transmission and other interventions.

Pennsylvania officials now recommend schools in counties with a “moderate” level of community transmission, according to the state’s Early Warning Monitoring Dashboard, consider returning students to full in-person instruction, in addition to hybrid learning. Counties with “substantial” community transmission — which includes several Western Pennsylvania counties, as of Monday — should offer hybrid and remote learning, the officials said.

“We remain committed to doing everything we can to create the conditions for a return to in-person instruction as soon as safely possible,” said Acting Secretary of Education Noe Ortega, in a statement. “Our updated instructional model recommendations create additional flexibilities for school leaders to make decisions at the local level consistent with best practices and with public health and safety at the forefront.”

Forty-five counties still remain in substantial transmission.

State officials have left reopening decisions and instructional models ultimately up to local leaders since the beginning of the pandemic and emphasized the update is a “recommendation and not a mandate.”

Most districts in Western Pennsylvania are already offering hybrid learning, and have been long before this announcement. Two of the last area districts to reopen classrooms were Pittsburgh Public Schools, which [is beginning a phased hybrid model this week](https://triblive.com/news/education-classroom/pittsburgh-public-schools-prepare-for-students-return-to-in-person-classes/?utm_source=triblive&utm_medium=display&utm_campaign=mesearch_rail_widget&pos=4), and Woodland Hills School District, which began a hybrid model last week.

“A safe return to in-person instruction will look different across every school, district, and county depending on a variety of factors, one of which is the spread of covid-19 within these communities,” Department of Health Acting Secretary Alison Beam said in a statement.

Prior to Monday’s announcement, the state Department of Education had revised various in-school guidelines out of adherence to CDC recommendations, including [relaxed social distancing requirements](https://triblive.com/news/pennsylvania/officials-relax-some-distancing-other-guidance-in-pennsylvania-schools/) and the length of school closures due to covid cases.

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