MERCED COUNTY
SCHOOL YEAR 2020-21

ACADEMIC PLANNING GUIDE

A framework to address the challenges of COVID-19

mcoe.org
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Message from School Superintendents</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Learning, Mental Health and Wellness</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Families Can Expect When Schools Reopen</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations for Schools</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Guidelines</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarantine and Contact Tracing</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Changes and Student Safety</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance/Virtual Learning Framework</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Programs &amp; Specialized Services</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Principles</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thanks to the following:
- Burton School District, Framework for Distance Learning
- CIF, Guidelines for Athletics
- Merced County Department of Health, Social Distancing Guidance
- Sacramento County Office of Education, Source for Guidance

Document Format
A Message from Merced County School District Superintendents

The Merced County Office of Education, in conjunction with the 20 local school districts and the Merced County Department of Public Health, are committed to providing children and families of our school communities the best options for returning to school in August. To provide consistent plans for school reopening, a working group was convened in May to plan for the reopening of our schools.

Since COVID-19 causes continual change to our working landscape in California, the following framework builds upon our experiences this past spring, sharing successful practices, leveraging resources, and including flexibility to meet the coming challenges in the 2020-2021 school year. This guide provides a framework for districts to consider as they continue to plan at the local level.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to solving the dilemmas created by COVID-19. Local school districts’ reopening plans will vary depending on the size of their student population, community needs, and state mandates. The education community will continue to work with state and local officials to provide the flexibility and service that our families need as conditions in Merced County will continue to change throughout the summer and the coming school year.

Our thanks to staff and school districts employees and parents who helped develop this framework. Special thanks go to the Merced County Department of Public Health Supervising Epidemiologist Dr. Kristynn Sullivan and Public Health Officer Dr. Salvador Sandoval.

Regards,
Steve Tietjen, Ed.D., Merced County Superintendent of Schools
Sandra Schiber, Ed.D., Atwater Elementary School District
Bliss Propes, Ballico-Cressey Elementary School District
Adolfo Melara, Delhi Unified School District
Justin Miller, Ed.D., Dos Palos-Oro Loma Joint Unified School District
Lori Gonzalez, El Nido Elementary School District
Bryan Ballenger, Ed.D., Gustine Unified School District
Isabel Cabral-Johnson, Hilmar Unified School District
Scott M. Borba, Le Grand Union Elementary School District
Donna Alley, Le Grand Union High School District
Andres Zamora, Livingston Union School District
Mike Crass, McSwain Union Elementary School District
Al Rogers, Ed.D., Merced City School District
Richard Lopez, Merced River Union Elementary School District
Alan Peterson, Merced Union High School District
Kristi Kingston, Plainsburg Union Elementary School District
Jose Gonzalez, Planada Elementary School District
Alison Kohl, Snelling-Merced Falls Union Elementary School District
John Curry, Weaver Union School District
Randall Heller, Winton Elementary School District
Social Emotional Learning, Mental Health and Wellness

The COVID-19 crisis has proven that schools are the heart of our community, for learning, nutrition, safety, and social-emotional well-being. Educators have shown they are flexible, skilled and creative in meeting the rapidly changing needs of students and families. At the same time, persistent educational inequities have been laid bare. As we look to the 2020-21 academic year, schools will need additional resources to become better equipped and skilled at remote learning, address learning loss, implement vital health and safety protocols, and support wellness and mental health.

When campuses reopen, it is vital to provide students with an environment that is friendly, supportive, and caring. We need to make sure all students return to class and reach out to those who do not. We must identify students who need help or are having difficulty adjusting. The trauma and stress we have experienced must be vocalized and addressed.

MCOE Health & Wellness Online Resources: mcoe.org/healthandwellness

The Five Core SEL Competencies

Social and Emotional Learning enhances students’ capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges.

SELF-AWARENESS
Accurately recognize one’s feelings and thoughts and their influence on behaviors. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations, and possessing a growth mindset, a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism.

SELF-MANAGEMENT
Regulate one’s emotions, cognitions, and behaviors to set and achieve personal and educational goals. This includes delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one’s self, and persevering in addressing challenges.

SOCIAL AWARENESS
Take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS
Establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING
Make constructive choices about personal behavior, social interactions, and school based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.
What Families Can Expect When Schools Reopen

The health and safety of our students, staff, and families is our top priority. When the 2020-2021 school year begins in Merced County, on-campus instruction and school life will look different than previous years because of new health and safety measures. Each district will develop plans to reopen schools based on guidance from public health officials and state agencies. District plans will be updated as the situation evolves.

It is important to note that district plans must focus sharply on academic instruction to enhance student performance and address learning loss. At the same time, districts will also try to maintain the extracurricular programs, clubs, and athletics that are so important to the physical, mental, and social well-being of our students.

On May 15, 2020, Governor Newsom shared California’s May Budget Revision for 2020-2021. Schools have never faced this level of funding cuts. These significant funding cuts for schools will impact the reopening of school campuses that will be faced with increased costs to address safety measures connected to the pandemic.

COUNTY-WIDE CHANGES IN PHYSICAL LAYOUT AND SCHEDULES WILL CREATE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

- Elementary schools will open with moderate changes to the daily routine.
- Middle schools, junior highs and high schools address social mixing.
- Each school is unique and will have its own set of criteria to maintain a safe environment for students and staff.
- Schools will reopen with both on-campus instruction and distance learning options.
- Below are some of the health and safety guidance recommendations by the Merced County Department of Public Health for reopening schools based on current information and will be updated as the situation evolves.

SELF-Screening PROCEDURE

- Families are recommended to take temperatures daily before going to school. Anyone with a fever of 100.4 or higher should not go to a school site.
- Some schools will take student temperatures as they arrive to the school site.
- Students and adults should also screen themselves for respiratory symptoms such as cough and shortness of breath prior to coming to school each day. Students and adults experiencing those symptoms should not attend school.

ARRIVING AT SCHOOL

- Staff will wear face coverings.
- School buses will have fewer students and students will be required to wear a face covering on buses. Students will sit no more than two to a seat. Family groups are encouraged to sit together.
- Parents and visitors may have limited access to the school campus.
- Arrival and dismissal times will vary depending on social distancing and other requirements at your schools.
Considerations for Schools

Quality instruction and a commitment to equity for ALL students is key to the success of educational programs. Each district will make decisions based on available resources, local needs, and state policy. At this time, schools will be required by Merced County Department Public Health to modify schedules to limit student mixing on campus. Because of various factors, including student mobility, student population and grade level, recommendations are different for elementary schools and high schools.

Elementary Schools

_Social distancing will help limit the spread of the virus._ Elementary schools will consider the following strategies to maintain smaller groups of students in shared spaces:

- Modify school schedules
- Limit visitors on campus
- Keep students in their classroom groups
- Serve meals in their classroom groups
- Space desks three feet apart between students
- Serve individually plated or boxed meals
- Where possible, keep student cohorts from mixing
- Stagger lunches, recesses, and other transition times
- Large gatherings such as assemblies and dances are prohibited

Grades 7-12

_High schools present a unique challenge during the pandemic, because there are a larger number of people on a high school campus and the mixing that is inherent with a high school model. Public Health officials recognize high schools can be a high risk school setting._

- Students must sanitize hands and seating area at the beginning and end of each period.
- Hand sanitizer will be available in all classrooms and hand washing stations will be available where feasible.
- Students will be dismissed on a staggered schedule.

If there is an outbreak of COVID-19, school schedules are subject to modification and further social distancing measure.

---

**SMALLER COHORTS/STUDENT GROUPS**

To minimize commingling of different student groups, classes will be divided into smaller cohorts/groups. This could include a staggered schedule where students in different cohorts would attend on different days.

**MODIFIED SCHEDULE**

- Implement a block schedule to reduce passing periods and possible points of contact in each classroom.
- Students will be cohorted to the extent possible at the secondary level, a minimum of two periods to a maximum of four periods. Middle Schools will block classes together for English/Social Studies and Math/Science so students are not commingling. Smaller district may look different than larger districts.

**STAGGER AND MODIFY SCHEDULE**

- Stagger start and end times within a day
- Modify recess schedules and lunch periods
- Stagger breakfast/lunch schedules or serve breakfast/lunch in classrooms.

**ROTATION OR ALTERNATE DAY SCHEDULE**

- One group of students may come to school on Monday and Wednesday, another on Tuesday and Thursday or any combination of two days per group. The fifth day could be flexible based on district/school site plans.
Athletics Guidelines

Sports and extracurricular activities are an important part of a school experience and school leaders have taken careful consideration on how to keep students safe. Some sports present a challenge because of the close contact between students. All students should follow the guidance of their coach and CIF.*

Considerations for Athletics

- Consider strategies to prevent groups from gathering at entrances/exits to facilities to limit crossover and contact, including staggering starting/ending times.
- All coaches and students should be screened daily for symptoms of COVID-19 prior to participating.
- Avoid out-of-county travel when possible, especially if counties are in different phases.
- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles must not be shared. Food should not be shared.
- In the absence of guidelines to the contrary, cloth face coverings are recommended. Exceptions are swimming, distance running or other high intensity aerobic activity.

Physical Activity and Athletic Equipment

- There should be no shared athletic equipment (towels, clothing, shoes, or sports specific equipment) between students.
- Students should wear their own appropriate workout clothing (do not share clothing).
- Individual clothing/towels should be washed and cleaned after every workout.
- All athletic equipment, including balls, should be cleaned after each individual use and prior to the next workout.
- Individual drills requiring the use of athletic equipment are permissible, but the equipment should be cleaned prior to use by the next individual.
- Physical contact such as high-fives, fist/chest bumps, and hugs are prohibited.

If social distancing is feasible and modifications are made, the following are examples of sports that may be may be offered with modifications:

- Swimming (one person per lane or every other lane)
- Diving
- Golf
- Tennis
- Cheerleading
- Cross Country
- Track and Field

The following sports involve close contact and are not currently recommended without modifications per CIF recommendations. As the school year approaches, further guidance will be forthcoming from public health, CIF, and state agencies:

- Basketball
- Football
- Water Polo
- Soccer
- Wrestling
- Baseball and Softball
- Volleyball

Field trips outside of Merced County and wrestling are not currently recommended. Consider virtual field trips when possible. Assemblies, dances, and rallies are also not recommended at this time.

*Based on CIF guidance to Superintendents, Principals and Athletic Directors
Quarantine and Contact Tracing

As part of our shared commitment, the Merced County Office of Education and the 20 local school districts are closely monitoring the on-going developments of COVID-19 in partnership with the Merced County Department of Public Health. As we work in partnership, we are clear that there is no single approach to reopening schools, as each school community is different and has unique needs.

An important component to any reopening plan is the ability to identify and isolate staff and students who test positive for COVID-19. Students learning in cohorts will create a more streamlined approach to identifying staff, students and other community members they may have come in contact with. Public Health officials have identified the infectious period as 48 hours before symptoms develop. If a staff member or student tests positive, the following contact tracing will be implemented.

**QUARANTINE PROCEDURE**

*Example – Student develops symptoms at school on Wednesday AM and is sent home, takes test Thursday AM, gets positive COVID-19 results Saturday AM. School contact investigation is Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday AM.*

(14 days, refer to testing if symptoms develop. Persons under quarantine who remain asymptomatic can also get tested at least 7 days post-exposure.)

**ALL CLOSE CONTACTS:**

- Individuals who have been within 6 feet for 15 minutes cumulatively (e.g., three 5-minute interactions would count as a close contact) during the infectious period.
- Close contacts will likely* include:
  - Siblings, regardless of school
  - Students in class/cohort
  - Student’s teacher, especially if child is in first two rows of class or spends whole day with same teacher
  - Students who ride the same bus
  - Student’s lunch group
  - Students/Coaches/Staff in sports team/extra-curricular activities/after school programs

**SELF-MONITORING PROCEDURE**

(14 days, Monitor for symptoms two times per day)

- All Contacts who do not qualify for quarantine
- Classmates, teachers, cohort members, staff persons and students in same: buses, lunch period, activities, etc.
- Janitorial staff who clean spaces with infected student.
Campus Changes Must Be Made to Keep Students Safe

A rigorous and robust education, along with daily social interaction, are fundamental for student academic and social success. School leaders have continued to work with the Merced County Department of Public Health to balance the ways to reopen schools that keep our students safe. Below are safety precautions and considerations so that students can attend classes in the safest way possible.

**GENERAL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

- Schools will follow disinfection guidelines developed by Merced County Public Health and Merced County Environmental Management for school campuses including classrooms, workspaces, outdoor spaces, and playgrounds.
- Physical barriers may be installed where social distancing is not possible.
- All students and staff will be required to wash/clean their hands regularly.
- Handwashing stations with soap and/or hand sanitizer should be made available in classrooms.
- Schools will limit sharing of supplies between students and disinfect between uses if sharing is unavoidable.

**OTHER SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

- Face coverings shall be worn by staff and students (particularly older students), as feasible, and are most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult.
- Face coverings may be challenging for students (especially younger students) to wear in all-day settings such as school.
Distance/Virtual Learning Framework

This framework outlines how schools may provide distance learning opportunities to students. It is not intended to address every potential instructional need, rather, give a framework for educators. The distance learning opportunities may include virtual lessons, resources for self-directed study, or work assignments for skills development.

Continuity of Education

Educators will ensure that learning continues for students through a distance learning platform. Teachers are mindful of their students’ ability to be successful with online learning as well as each student’s home setting. We recommend teachers participate in professional development to effectively implement distance learning. We recommend that parents assess their own capacity to support their child with distance learning.

MCOE Distance Learning Online Resources: mcoe.org/distancelearning

PERSONAL CHECK-INS

While social distancing is a necessary precaution, students miss their friends and teachers. To meet that need teachers will conduct daily, live, video check-ins with students through virtual platforms.

DAILY LIVE LESSONS

Each day, educators will provide new lessons for students and families. Keeping students connected and learning is crucial for long-term academic and social-emotional well-being.

DIRECT FEEDBACK

Personal, direct feedback is a critical practice in normal settings, but is even more necessary for distance learning. Students, teachers, and parents can provide feedback through learning management platforms and in-person.
Student Programs & Specialized Services

Merced County schools have many specialized programs that serve students of all ages and abilities. It is crucial that we make considerations for these students groups and our after school programs. To address childcare needs, community partnerships will be explored to offer expanded learning programs (before school, after school, and summer programs) to support families, especially families with preschool and elementary students. Accommodations for students with disabilities, students with diverse learning needs, students who are medically vulnerable, and English learners will be made as needed.

Special Education

Consider the need for Individualized Education Program (IEP) addendums that outline instruction and services that can be offered through on-campus instruction, distance learning or a blended model of on-campus and distance learning. The addendum should consider the following:

- How instruction will be provided,
- Social-emotional learning supports
- Related services and accommodations needed
- What assistive technology is necessary
- How each LEA will assess and address learning loss

After School Program

- After School Program (ASP) will resume in the fall and the same procedures will apply to the ASP as the school day, including students remaining in their assigned group
- Staff will wear masks and students will be encouraged to wear masks

Extra/Co Curricular Activities

- Meet with club leaders and coaches to prepare for the reopening of activities. Coaches may meet outside with small groups of students to prepare for athletics. All students and coaches must adhere to the hand sanitizing when entering and leaving the campus. All students must bring their own water bottles for practice.
- All activities must adhere to all safety procedures.

Early Learning and Care Center-Based Programs

- Students will be screened prior to entering classrooms.
- Parents will meet at entry for drop-off of children and be as brief as possible.
- Meals will be delivered to each classroom or students will be allowed to eat in the cafeteria by class cohort if space allows and cleaning procedures are in place between groups.
- Students who board the bus to school will be screened by trained staff. Buses will be equipped with hand sanitizer and students will be required to sanitize as they board the bus.
- Students will be required to remain in their class cohort the entire day
- Breaks/recess will be staggered by class cohorts. Each cohort will have a designated play area and be required to rest/play in designated area.
- All classrooms will have a scheduled time for handwashing throughout the day.
- All campuses will be closed to the public. There will be one entry point during the instructional day for parents/guardians to access the office in case of an emergency or for urgent matters. Parents must wear a mask to enter campus.
- Staff will wear masks during class time and staff can choose between masks and face shields.
Guiding Principles

1. QUALITY INSTRUCTION

Whether in a distance learning or in-person platform, quality instruction is key to the success of educational programs since coursework delivered through hybrid modalities must continue to be available (on-campus and distance learning) and should meet the same standards as coursework offered only on-campus.

2. COMMIT TO EQUITY

All students must have opportunities to achieve academic success that are accessible, personalized, culturally relevant, and responsive. Schools have a responsibility to be culturally and linguistically responsive and meet the continued needs of ALL students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, English learners, and students from diverse cultures.

3. ADOPT WHOLE SCHOOL WELLNESS APPROACH

Take a systems approach to promoting student academic, social, and emotional learning, physical well-being, and college, career, and civic readiness. Adopt a whole school wellness approach to ensure student and adult success in school, work, and community.

4. PARTNER WITH STUDENTS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITY, AND LABOR GROUPS

Engage with students, families, community partners, and labor groups to build collective impact and support public health. Maximize the resources of the entire community, including health care, expanded learning, early learning, and family and community partnerships to implement health and safety protocols and to advance alternative learning modalities.

5. LEARN AND IMPROVE

Adopt continuous improvement practices and use evidence to guide decision-making while aiming to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. Use data to inform improvement of instructional and school practices. Work together, leverage our collective positive effect through advocacy, and share best practices and resources. To maximize impact, MCOE and district leaders will establish an infrastructure designed to promote ongoing collaboration and sharing of best practices among districts.