

Determining Instructional Models During the COVID-19 Pandemic Pennsylvania Department of Education (August 10,2020)

Link to PDE Website Page: [Recommendations for Pre-K to 12 Schools](#)

“In response to school leaders' need for additional guidance as to the risk of COVID-19 transmission in their communities, the Departments of Health and Education are providing recommendations to Pre-K to 12 schools for use when making decisions related to the instructional models used during the 2020-21 school year.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's [Guidance and Resources for Pre-K to 12 Schools](#) contains additional information related to the safe reopening of schools for the 2020-21 school year.

It is important to note that 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. School entity decisions on instructional models require a great deal of consideration of local factors including size of the school entity, classroom size, school resources, proportion of staff and students with special needs and underlying health conditions, and the ability to accommodate remote learning with equal access for all students.

The recommendations contained in this guidance rely on two standard public health metrics: **incidence rate** and the **percent positivity** of diagnostic testing. These metrics are available for every county in Pennsylvania on the [COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard](#).

The chart below, using measurements from the White House Coronavirus Task Force, identifies thresholds representing low, moderate, or substantial community transmission of COVID-19, and corresponding instructional models recommended by the Departments of Health and Education.

Level of Community Transmission in the County	Incidence Rate per 100,000 Residents (Most Recent 7 Days)	AND/OR	PCR Percent Positivity (Most Recent 7 Days)	PCR Percent Positivity (Most Recent 7 Days)
Low	<10	AND	<5%	Full in-person Model OR Blended Learning Model
Moderate	10 to <100	OR	5% to <10%	Blended Learning Model OR Full Remote Learning Mode
Substantial <i>*Cambria County 11/20 Designation</i>	≥100	OR	≥10%	Full Remote Learning Model

For ease of use, once per week, the Department of Education will publish a list identifying the level of community transmission in each county over the most recent 7-day reporting period. Access this list, which is called the [Level of Community Transmission Table](#).

If fewer than 10 new cases are reported in a county in the most recent 7-day reporting period, the county will automatically qualify as exhibiting a low level of community transmission.

Transitioning Between Instructional Models

A county's corresponding threshold may change week-by-week as incidence and percent positivity rates rise and fall. In order to confirm stability of county transmission, when a county's corresponding threshold changes, school entities should wait to see the results from the next 7-day reporting period before considering a change to their instructional models. To ensure the most effective transition for students, it may be appropriate for a school to wait even longer, up to a full marking period, to transition to an instructional model that increases in-person instruction.

It is important to note that a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based model more quickly.

The Department of Health will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

Instructional Model Definitions

Various terms are used to describe the manner by which schools reduce the transmission of disease through alternative instructional models. No matter which instructional model a school entity has selected, schools must implement the **Health and Safety Plans** approved by their local governing body and all associated mitigation strategies, including applicable orders of the Secretary of Health.

For the purpose of these recommendations, the following terms are used:

- **Full In-person Model:** School is open each day with in-person instruction for all students (with some students/staff in a remote setting as health and safety concerns require).
- **Blended (Hybrid) Learning Model:** Any model in which the [number of students in a school building is reduced to allow for social distancing of 6 feet](#). This may be accomplished in many ways, including split schedules, schedules that rotate by day or week, or similar approaches. For these recommendations, blended learning also includes scaffolded approaches that treat grade levels in a differentiated manner.
- **Full Remote Learning Model:** Any model in which all students engage in all learning remotely."