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# Metro Denver Partnership for Health

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February 19, 2021

To: Members of the Denver Area School Superintendents Council

The Metro Denver Partnership for Health (MDPH) updated its [COVID-19 Strategies for Schools](#) in December 2020 to provide evidence-informed public health recommendations for the region's school districts as they planned for in-person learning in 2021. This guidance is intended to compliment the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's school guidance regarding [cases and outbreaks](#) with which Colorado schools are required to comply.

The recently-released updated guidelines from [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) regarding in-person learning for K-12 schools align well with the principles underlying our December guidance:

- The emphasis on the benefits of in-person learning, particularly for the youngest children and also to address disparities and inequities.
- The emphasis on prioritizing in-person K-12 learning over extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics) and nonessential businesses and activities.
- The effectiveness of a matrix of basic prevention measures in assuring that in-person learning is safe for students and staff (e.g., masking, good ventilation, distancing, cohorting, handwashing, staying home when symptomatic, contact tracing).
- The use of expanded COVID testing as an adjunct to basic prevention measures.

However, the MDPH guidance differs from the CDC guidance in two areas: the recommended amount of distancing and the use of metrics of community transmission in determining the appropriateness of in-person learning. In preparing its December update, MDPH reviewed the most current research about COVID-19 transmission *and* the experiences of metro school districts in the fall of 2020.

CDC guidance recommends a minimum of 6 feet of distance between people in schools, whereas the MDPH guidance recommends a minimum of 3 feet. Our interpretation of the existing data and the experience of Denver areas schools is that 3 feet of distancing is safe, particularly when universal masking is in place.

In collaboration with Denver areas school districts, MDPH analyzed the association between measures of community transmission (14-day case rate, percent positivity on PCR testing), school safety, and disruption during the fall of 2020. While higher rates of community transmission resulted in increased disruption of in-person learning (quarantine of students, administrative closures of classes and schools due to quarantine of exposed teachers), we did not identify a threshold of community transmission that was correlated with high rates of in-school transmission. Therefore, we do not recommend the use of community measures of COVID activity to make decisions about in-person learning. Rather, we recommend careful assessment of in-school transmission as the best measure of the safety of in-person learning.

Notably, state and local leaders have taken other important steps to promote the safety of in-person learning, such as prioritization of early childhood education (ECE) through grade 12 staff for COVID vaccination, providing teachers with high-quality (KN-95) masks, and supporting routine testing among students and staff. We feel the December 2020 MDPH update offers evidence-informed mitigation and prevention strategies for students and staff that remain relevant and applicable for our region's schools.

The MDPH guidance recommends that schools collect data to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation strategies. Measuring and monitoring trends in rates of intra-school transmission among students and staff, for example, can provide actionable information to schools about the strength of existing mitigation measures and strengthen decision making on in-person learning. We support your collaborative data-collection activities and welcome opportunities to work together using these data to inform our efforts as we close out this school year and plan for the next.

Thank you for your efforts in support of our communities. With the current trend in declining community case rates and the increasing protection of our most vulnerable residents and ECE-12 staff through vaccination, we believe that the conditions in the Denver metro area are very promising for the plans you are making for a safe return to greater in-person learning. We look forward to our continued partnership.

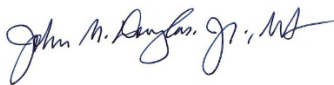
Regards,



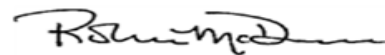
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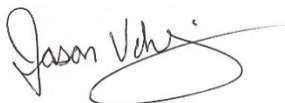
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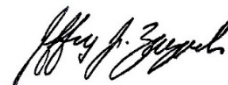
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