

# COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



**STEVEN BELLONE**  
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

**GREGSON H. PIGOTT, MD, MPH**  
Commissioner

April 22, 2021

Dear Superintendents:

We continue to see progress in our response to COVID-19. The number of Suffolk County residents who are receiving COVID-19 vaccinations continues to increase while our daily COVID-19 case count continues to decline. As such, we are seeing updated guidance almost daily in regards to a range of activities including social events, return to work, and further reopening of our schools. The Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS) recognizes the critical role of our schools in the community and fully supports their reopening. We also recognize that there is not a universal approach to reopen schools. Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) have updated guidance with the most significant change related to the shortening of physical distances in the classrooms. Most important is communication with your school community and assessing their tolerance of risk as it relates to school opening plans. As described in the NYSDOH guidance, **“Ultimately, the school / district’s decision to move to shorter physical distances will come down to a local community’s risk tolerance based on its unique circumstances.”**

Several questions have been posed to SCDHS about the reopening guidance. Please consider the following in your decision making process:

- **Barriers.** Barriers are no longer required but they are not prohibited. If barriers are a tool your community feels appropriate, continue to use.
- **Masks.** Mask wearing is essential and required at all times, except for meals. Students who are unable to medically tolerate a mask, including students where such a mask would impair their physical health or mental health, are not subject to the required use of a mask.
- **Community Transmission.** Current metrics include countywide data located at: [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) and [NYS COVID-19 Dashboard](#). School districts may also review town level data found here: [Suffolk County COVID-19 Case Tracker](#), as well as data collected and reported by the schools related to COVID-19 cases in your school buildings.
- **Quarantine.** NYSDOH has confirmed that the **definition of close contact has not changed** and individuals who are within six feet of a COVID-19 case for ten minutes or more over a 24-hour period will be required to quarantine from date of last exposure.

As long as the community is fully informed, has the opportunity to provide feedback, and supports the reduction of physical distances in the classroom, SCDHS will support those plans for elementary, middle, and high schools. Many school districts have made incredible investments in keeping their community safe this school year. If districts opt to continue in the manner they have been operating, SCDHS will support those plans as well.



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Suffolk County school districts have proven to be exceptional partners in the response to COVID-19. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, our schools have successfully implemented plans that have helped to reduce transmission in the classrooms and schools remain a safe environment. We are confident that together with your school community, you will determine the best way to move forward and balance both the educational and public health needs of your school community.

If your district plans to adjust operations, please submit those plans to [jennifer.culp@suffolkcountyny.gov](mailto:jennifer.culp@suffolkcountyny.gov). Thank you for your continued support and efforts to keep our communities safe.

Sincerely,



Gregson H. Pigott, MD, MPH  
Commissioner