



MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

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Additional Health Officer Recommendations Regarding School Reopening

San Juan County Health Officer Dr. Frank James recently released expanded guidance to local school district leaders regarding the opening of schools, in particular grades 7-12.

The only modifications to the [existing guidance](#) are:

- Dr. James supports school district leadership in their effort to develop plans that expand their reopening strategies beyond the 6th grade limit discussed in the previous guidance. At this time, making concrete plans to reopen schools up to the 12th grade level is a reasonable approach.
- Any expansion should be done incrementally, adding to the volume of students back in school in a moderated and thoughtful manner.
- All school districts should have detailed reopening plans in place. School staff need to be well trained on these plans, given all resources needed to implement them, and a system should be in place to objectively measure compliance- ideally via a safety officer whose job it is to regularly evaluate the consistency of safety measures by both students and staff.
- Any reopening should incorporate detailed operational plans for ensuring small cohorts of students, minimizing mixing of groups, compliance with mask wearing and hand washing, and providing ample time for facility maintenance and sanitation activities.
- Guidance on athletic activities is under review. Stay tuned for details, including a potential increased opportunity for indoor athletics.
- As always, this is not a mandate to reopen or for schools to follow any specific timeline or approach. It is a tool to support school district leaders in their effort to make carefully considered and well implemented decisions about their approaches to reopening.
- The entire school community needs to be prepared for potential reversals of any reopening for reasons related to community safety- potentially with very short notice.

Dr. James highlights the expansion of this guidance, "The science continues to point in the direction that school can be done safely, so long as reopening plans are very well thought out, and fully adhered to. Getting kids back in school should be a priority, so long as it can be done in a way that does not impact overall community health."

"It is important," Dr. James continues, "that we realize that there will be cases that involve students and staff. To keep those situations from shutting down any reopening, schools must be operating with strict adherence to guidelines around social distancing, mask wearing, and hygiene. And just as importantly, students, their families, and school staff need to make decisions in their own lives away from school to minimize the risk of them jeopardizing the reopening effort."