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EDUCATION EQUITY

Oakland Unified schools have a reopening plan. Here's what it means

OUSD schools could open as early as January. But the district still has to negotiate with the teachers' union and COVID case rates have to improve, which means a lot can still change.



by **Ashley McBride**
December 2, 2020



An upstairs hallway with a custodians cart and various items ready to be stored away for the semester in West Oakland Middle School. Credit: Pete Rosos

Amid worsening COVID rates in California and across the country, the Oakland Unified School District [released a preliminary plan](#) Tuesday for reopening schools to in-person learning beginning in January.

But the release of the plan is just one step in the reopening process: The Alameda County Office of Education must first approve the plan. Next, district leaders and the Oakland Education Association teachers' union will have to negotiate a new contract before teachers go back into classrooms. And COVID case rates in the county must improve before students and faculty can go back to school.

Under the new plan, when would schools reopen?

OUSD leaders want to reopen schools starting Jan. 25 for students in pre-K through 2nd grade, Feb. 1 for third through fifth grades, and Feb. 8 for sixth through 12th grades. But those dates are contingent on health conditions in the county. With a case rate of more than [9 daily new cases](#) per 100,000 people and a 3.6% positivity rate, Alameda County is in the state's most restrictive "purple tier," which means schools that are not already open, including all OUSD schools, must remain closed. Alameda County will have to drop back down into the red tier, one step below purple, for two weeks, before OUSD schools can open for in-person instruction, under the state's guidelines.

But OUSD's plan is even more restrictive than that: Oakland schools would not reopen until the county is in the "orange" tier. Alameda County is currently at more than double the required case rate for the orange tier.

Who would go back first?

Under this plan, pre-K through second grade students would return to the classroom first, with upper grades in the following weeks. Older students who may have more difficulty with distance learning, like special education students, will also begin in-person learning first.

Will in-person learning be mandatory?

No. Families can also choose to remain in distance learning for the year.

Would students go to school every day?

No—but the number of days a student attends in-person classes would depend on the number of students who opt for in-person learning, classroom availability, and teacher availability. Under the plan, students would come to school two to four days a week, in groups of eight to 10 students. If there are more than 10 students in a particular class that want to learn in person, the class could be split into two groups, with Group A attending school on Mondays and Tuesdays and Group B in school on Thursdays and Fridays. If all the students can fit into one class, then they would go to school on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

The cohorts would stay together all day, including lunch and recess.

What safety precautions will be taken?

All students (kindergarten through 12th grade) and staff will be required to wear masks on campus. Teachers can also wear face shields over their masks, or masks with a clear section in the front so students can see their mouths. Students with developmental disabilities or other conditions that make it tougher to wear a mask will not be prohibited from coming to school, but they will be encouraged to keep a face covering on. Students and staff will be kept at least six feet apart from each other throughout the day.

Every day before coming onto campus, all students and staff will be asked whether anyone in their household has contracted COVID-19, and whether they have any symptoms. They will be sent home if they have potentially been exposed or have any symptoms.

To maintain social distancing, outdoor spaces will be used as classrooms when possible, hallways will be designated as one way, and class times will be staggered to prevent crowding in halls.

What happens if a student or teacher tests positive?

If there is a positive case in one cohort—a group of students who attend the same classes—then all students and staff in that group will be required to quarantine for two weeks. If two or more cohorts of students have a positive

case, the entire school will shut down and everyone will quarantine at home for two weeks. If more than a quarter of the schools in the district are in quarantine, then all schools will be closed.

How often will schools be cleaned?

Classrooms will be stocked with spray bottles and paper towels to use throughout the day. Custodians will clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces, like doorknobs, light switches, and desks, each night. Bathrooms will be cleaned and restocked with soap and paper towels three times a day. Surfaces in hallways and stairwells will also be sanitized three times each day. Playground equipment will be cleaned once a day.

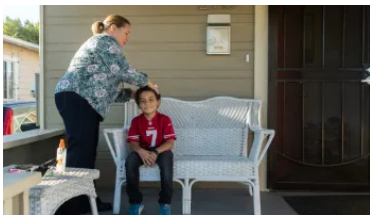
Can this plan change?

Yes. The school district still has to negotiate details with the teachers' union, which could take weeks. And the reopening dates in the plan are not set in stone, since health conditions must also improve before school buildings can reopen.

How can I share my thoughts on this plan?

Oakland Unified is collecting feedback on its reopening plan through [this Google form](#).

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ASHLEY MCBRIDE

✉ ashley@oaklandside.org

Ashley McBride reports on education equity for The Oaklandside. She covered the 2019 Oakland Unified School District teachers' strike as a breaking news reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. More recently, she was an education reporter for the San Antonio Express-News where she covered several local school districts, charter schools, and the community college system. McBride earned her master's degree in journalism from Syracuse University, has held positions at the Palm Beach Post and the Poynter Institute, and is a recent Hearst Journalism Fellow.

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