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# COVID in schools: California to clarify independent study law



Pandemic safety reminder signs are placed on doors at Redwood High School in Larkspur on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

By **KERI BRENNER** | Marin Independent Journal

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Students who are sidelined by the delta variant of COVID-19 might be able to take classes via independent study during quarantine, state officials confirmed.

In addition, school districts will not lose state funding over student absences in quarantine, as they would under normal circumstances, the state said Friday.



“The districts will get reimbursed,” Alex Stack, a spokesperson for Gov. Gavin Newsom, said Friday.

Stack’s comments come as state lawmakers seek to introduce amendments to clarify [Assembly Bill 130](#), passed over the summer. The bill [mandates](#) that every school offer a semester-long or year-long online independent study option in case parents want to keep their children home for virus safety reasons.

However, schools have found they need instead to adapt and repurpose the online independent study classes from long programs with extended commitments to temporary fixes in quarantine.

The law is in need of clarification because parents are questioning how their children can avoid falling behind in quarantine — even suggesting a school district revert to last year’s remote learning and hybrid programs. Some Bay Area parents, such as in [Cupertino](#), have demanded a return to remote learning due to rising coronavirus case levels.

The state is wary about reverting to remote learning programs again after students suffered mental health issues and learning loss from being isolated all day, looking at computer screens, Stack said.

“We saw the effect of distance learning on kids last year,” Stack said. “It’s not a great way for kids to learn.”

In Marin, public health officials are addressing the problem from a different angle by using a modified quarantine approach to allow some students who might have been exposed to the virus, but who are asymptomatic and who meet other criteria, to still attend classes. If approved for modified quarantine, the students may attend classes, but they are not allowed to engage in extracurricular activities such as sports.

According to Dr. Lisa Santora, Marin deputy public health officer, students are allowed modified quarantine after investigation by county staff. County investigators determine whether the students were at school during the infectious period, defined as two days prior to a positive test or onset of symptoms; whether the students’ close contacts are fully vaccinated; and whether the students and their close contacts were masked at the time of exposure.

“Modified quarantine allows students who were wearing masks and had a supervised school exposure to a masked case to stay in school,” Santora said. “Students unmasked during exposure and students exposed to an unmasked case do not qualify for modified quarantine.”



According to the nonprofit California education publication [EdSource](#), the state’s “cleanup language” for Assembly Bill 130 was scheduled to be introduced Friday as part of another bill attached to the state budget as a “trailer bill.”

If the amendments are approved by the Legislature, the governor will have until Oct. 10 to sign off on them, Stack said.

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