



HOOD RIVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HRCSD plans to reopen schools for in-person instruction

Hood River County School District (HRCSD) continues to partner with the Hood River County Health Department with regards to returning to in-person instruction. It is also following the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) [advisory general metrics](#), which were updated last week. When Hood River County enters the orange zone of the updated general metrics and HRCSD educators have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, HRCSD plans to return elementary students to their neighborhood schools using a “phase-in” approach, beginning with kindergarten students and expanding to third grade students.

HRCSD is targeting the beginning of March, which aligns with the start of the third trimester for elementary students, to return to in-person instruction. The timeline for returning kindergarten through third grade (K-3) students to their neighborhood schools depends on several factors, including:

- Meeting the ODE advisory metrics for returning to on-site learning
- Seeing a downward trend in case rates across Hood River County
- Providing HRCSD staff an opportunity to access the COVID-19 vaccine
- Continuing to educate HRCSD stakeholders on the importance of embracing health and safety protocols

The state requirements related to physical distancing and cohorting create logistical challenges to return students in grades fourth through twelfth (4-12) for regular on-site learning. The school district will continue to increase student engagement and peer interaction for 4-12 students by expanding limited in-person instruction (LIPI) and co-curricular activities. ODE said it will continue to review and revise the health and safety requirements for in-person instruction, forecasting an update in approximately two months.

On Tuesday, Jan. 19, ODE [announced](#) changes to the advisory health metrics for returning students to in-person instruction, aligning with the Harvard Global Health Institute guidelines. In addition, ODE updated the [Ready School, Safe Learners](#) guidance.

Key highlights of these changes include:

- Allowing schools to reopen under higher levels of COVID-19 case rates
- Advising school districts to “phase-in” students for in-person instruction, beginning with elementary students
- Providing school districts a greater ability to make local decisions

ODE did not change the mandatory physical distancing requirement as described in the Ready School, Safe Learners guidance. Each student still must have a “space bubble” of 35 square feet. This requirement is a barrier to resuming in-person instruction for all elementary students and secondary students given space limitations within school buildings. ODE also did not change the mandatory cohort requirement. A student may not have contact with more than 100 people per week. This requirement is a significant barrier to resuming in-person instruction for secondary students within HRCSD.

This week, HRCSD began offering LIPI to a small group of students within HRCSD. Hood River County Health Department supported this effort, provided that all schools followed closely the health and safety protocols in the [Operational Blueprints](#). In other positive news, HRCSD is collaborating with the health department and local health providers on offering vaccine doses to HRCSD employees as efficiently as possible. Educators are included in Phase 1b of the county’s vaccination plan and are in queue to receive vaccine doses as soon as they arrive in Hood River County.