



GOVERNOR DUCEY ISSUES EXECUTIVE ORDER REQUIRING SCHOOLS TO OFFER IN-PERSON LEARNING

Posted on March 4, 2021 by Office of the Governor



Order Sets March 15 Deadline To Get Students "Back In The Classroom"

Following discussions with public school leaders, and in accordance with new guidance from the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Governor Doug Ducey issued a new Executive Order returning schools to in-person, teacher-led instruction.

According to metrics developed by the CDC, 12 of Arizona's 15 counties are in phases where all schools are safe to open, including in the state's two largest counties, Maricopa and Pima.

"Arizona's students need to be back in the classroom. More than half of Arizona's schools are open and offering in-person options. More schools need to follow their lead, and pave the way for equitable education options for every Arizona student," said Governor Ducey. "The CDC and numerous health officials have said time and time again that schools are safe and kids can go back to the classroom. We prioritized teachers in our vaccine distribution, and many have already received their second dose. The science is clear: it's time all kids have the option to return to school so they can get back on track and we can close the achievement gap."

Under the order, schools are to return to in-person learning by March 15, or after Spring Break. An exception is made for middle and high schools located in counties with "high" transmission of COVID-19, as defined by the CDC — which currently includes just three Arizona counties: Coconino, Yavapai, and Pinal. However, CDC is clear that there is a safe pathway for all schools to open at any transmission level, and to stay open if they implement proper mitigation strategies. A student may continue participating in virtual instruction if their parent or guardian chooses so.

The Governor's order is being enthusiastically welcomed by champions of education in the Arizona state legislature.

"Arizona's kids and families have undergone a tremendous amount of stress throughout the pandemic," said Senator Paul Boyer of Glendale, Chairman of the Arizona Senate Education Committee. "I'm glad to see more students going back to the classroom, and today's guidance from the Arizona Department of Health Services will help ensure families that are ready to send their kids back can do so."

This sentiment is echoed by Mesa resident Representative Michelle Udall, Chairman of the House Education Committee.

"The data is clear — kids can go back to school," she said. "Many students have fallen behind, especially those in low income communities. The Governor's order will protect students' needs, while following CDC guidance."

Today's order updates school reopening benchmarks developed and announced in August 2020, with the metrics recently developed by the CDC. The metrics define "low", "moderate", "substantial" and "high" transmission levels with operational strategies for schools to reopen at all transmission levels. The Arizona Department of Health Services released the latest county-by-county information based on the CDC metrics.

National Public Health Experts Agree

A recent [report](#) from the Journal of the American Medical Association note that schools are safe for students and faculty:

"As many schools have reopened for in-person instruction in some parts of the US as well as internationally, school-related cases of COVID-19 have been reported, but there has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission...

"In the fall of 2020, 11 school districts in North Carolina with more than 90,000 students and staff were open for in-person education for 9 weeks. During this time, within-school transmissions were very rare (32 infections acquired in schools; 773 community-acquired infections) and there were no cases of student-to-staff transmission." Prominent health officials also have consistently stated that students can go back to the classroom.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, CDC Director, said on February 3: "There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated. Vaccinations of teachers is not a prerequisite for safely reopening schools."

"I want to be very clear about schools, which is: Yes, ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) has put teachers in the 1b category, the category of essential workers," she said. "But I also want to be clear that there is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated in order to reopen safely." Arizona included teachers in the 1B priority group for vaccination, meaning many have already received their second dose.

On January 28, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci said:

"It's less likely for a child to get infected in the school setting than if they were just in the community."

In November 2020, former CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield said:

"The truth is, for kids K-12, one of the safest places they can be from our perspective is to remain in school."

The Arizona Department of Health Services' web dashboard will be updated to reflect these new criteria, and will still share all relevant data. According to the CDC's benchmarks, grades kindergarten through sixth should be open for hybrid learning, no matter the infection rate in the community. For middle and high school, the CDC also recommends hybrid in all Arizona counties. Under these criteria, schools must offer in-person learning.

View the updated CDC guidance [HERE](#).

View the Governor's Executive Order [HERE](#).