

Dear Colleague,

On March 13, 2020, history was made as school buildings across Pennsylvania were ordered to close due to COVID-19. Each day, week, and month that followed introduced new challenges, intensified inequities, and unparalleled obstacles - forming a year that has been unlike anything anyone has ever experienced.

Through it all, you never lost sight of your “why.” You spent the past year working within rapidly changing and completely unpredictable circumstances, breaking down indescribable barriers, and creating new structures and systems that will remain part of our collective educational landscape for years to come.

Today, as acting secretaries of the Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE), we write to you not only to express our deepest gratitude for your incredible work, but to share updates that will impact the remainder of your school year and beyond.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine for Teachers, Child Care Workers, and School Staff**

Last week, the [Food and Drug Administration authorized the Johnson & Johnson single-dose COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use](#) - Pennsylvania anticipates receiving approximately 95,000 doses of this vaccine next this week.

To support our collective priority of safely reopening schools and classrooms as soon as possible, Governor Tom Wolf and the [COVID-19 Vaccine Joint Task Force](#) will dedicate the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to teachers, child care workers, and school staff across Pennsylvania.

We are working with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and National Guard in partnering with the 28 Intermediate Units (IUs) to establish vaccine sites across the commonwealth (Philadelphia County is a separate vaccine jurisdiction). Each IU region will have at least one vaccination location with most locations starting vaccinations next week. Individuals teaching the youngest learners and vulnerable students who benefit most from in-person learning (students with disabilities and English learners) will be prioritized for vaccination. Your local IU will be in touch with you very soon to discuss logistics and next steps specific to your school community.

We are also working with retail pharmacies to ensure our child care workers, who are providing an essential service to working families across the commonwealth, have access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

It’s important for us to note that the voluntary vaccination of Pennsylvania’s teachers, child care workers, and school staff is considered a special initiative separate from the ongoing [Phase 1A vaccine rollout](#).

[Access more information and answers to questions about this special initiative on PDE’s website.](#)

### **Update to Instructional Model Guidance**

On January 7, 2021, the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health provided school leaders with [recommendations on which instructional models](#) they should implement during the second semester based on changing levels of community transmission of COVID-19 in their counties. Today,

those recommendations have been updated in response to [guidance recently issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC).

Consistent with the CDC, the Departments now recommend public schools in counties with low transmission consider returning all students to in-person instruction and public schools in counties with moderate transmission consider providing hybrid/blended learning models.

As before, we continue to recommend public schools located in counties with substantial community transmission consider fully-remote instruction for all students or providing blended in-person instruction to elementary school students only, provided they follow all applicable orders and safety protocols.

Mitigation strategies such as physical distancing and masking remain essential to operating safe learning environments regardless of instructional model.

As always, these recommendations are dependent on local factors including size of the school entity, classroom size, school resources, proportion of staff and students with special needs and underlying health conditions, and the ability to accommodate remote learning with equal access for all students.

The [instructional model recommendations](#) are not a mandate, and school entities that have already submitted Health and Safety Plans do not need to resubmit their plans as long as they comply with the attestation process and associated orders. School entities, however, are encouraged to revisit their Health and Safety plans to ensure that they reflect current mitigation efforts and safety protocols. The Wolf Administration continues to maintain that, as local leaders, you are best positioned to make instructional decisions that account for the county level transmission metrics and additional local factors including local resources and community needs.

In anticipation of future conditions that may allow for an accelerated return to in-person instruction, the Departments will continue to adjust guidance and resources accordingly.

Thank you for continuing to serve your students and communities well as we navigate this unprecedented challenge together.

Sincerely,

Alison Beam, Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health

Noe Ortega, Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education