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**Ventura County Public Health Accepting School Waivers**  
***Allows for in person instruction when approved***

Ventura, CA – Ventura County Public Health has announced today that public and private elementary schools in Ventura County can submit school waiver applications to allow in-person instruction at their campuses. The waivers cover Tk through 6<sup>th</sup> grades.

In accordance with state guidelines, waivers may be granted "when requested by a local superintendent (or equivalent for charter or private schools), in consultation with labor, parent and community organizations. Local health officers must review local community epidemiological data, consider other public health interventions, and consult with the California Department of Public Health when considering a waiver request."

In counties such as Ventura County that are on the state's COVID-19 monitoring list, grammar schools can't reopen unless granted a waiver by local and state health officials.

"This was a difficult decision. I recognize there are reasons not to open our Health Department to requests for waivers, but we got to the point where I feel the benefits outweigh the risks," said Doctor Robert Levin, Ventura County Public Health Officer. "Research shows that our youngest children derive significant benefits from in-person interaction with their teachers and with one another in the school setting. We will ensure that schools have a solid plan in place to protect their students and staff and they will work with the health department when there is a case to prevent further spread of the virus. I feel that children K through grade 6 can receive education in a manner that is both rewarding and safe."

At the time the state outlined the waiver process for elementary schools, Ventura County did not immediately begin accepting applications. "I've waited before approving this because I wanted to see some improvement in our number of COVID cases. Guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Harvard's Global Health Institute, the Chan School of Public Health and the Edmund J. Safra Center for Ethics all would have supported opening up our grammar schools for waivers weeks ago. I've tried to be more cautious," said Dr. Levin.

"Also know that it will be a challenge for schools to get waiver approval. It will not be a done deal. Schools will have to meet rigorous standards of safety and responsibility," said Dr. Levin. All grammar schools applying for waivers, public or private, are directed to meet, at a minimum, the criteria laid out in the document "Framework for Reopening Ventura County Schools" at the site [VCOE.org/coronavirus](https://vcoe.org/coronavirus). Middle schools and high schools are not eligible for waivers. The waiver application itself should be sent to: [covidschools@ventura.org](mailto:covidschools@ventura.org).

One of the most challenging aspects of the waiver application will be a school's plan for regular COVID testing of its staff and, if they should show symptoms of an illness, of its students as well.

The preponderance of evidence indicates that children are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe disease resulting from COVID-19 infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection to others.

The State guidance lists conditions that must be met in applying for a waiver:

- A school or district must publish a school’s reopening plan online and, before applying, consult with parents, community organizations and teachers or, in the case of school districts, employee unions.
- The application will apply only to TK to sixth grade, even if the school includes seventh and eighth grades. “Based on the current best available scientific evidence, COVID-related risks in schools serving elementary-age students (grades TK-6) are lower than and different from the risks to staff and to students in schools serving older students,” the department said in an [FAQ accompanying the guidance](#).
- The school must show evidence that it would comply with all the safety and hygiene requirements for opening elementary schools, as listed in the [CDPH/CalOSHA Guidance for Schools and School-Based Programs](#). These include a 6-foot social distancing requirement, face covering requirements, staff training and family education and student and staff testing.

Waiver and Guiding Principle Documents

- Waiver: [https://vcportal.ventura.org/covid19/docs/pr/2020-08-19\\_VCPH\\_WaiverTemplate.pdf](https://vcportal.ventura.org/covid19/docs/pr/2020-08-19_VCPH_WaiverTemplate.pdf).
- Ventura County Public Health Guiding Principles and Communication for School District: [https://vcportal.ventura.org/covid19/docs/pr/2020-08-19\\_VCPH\\_SchoolDistrictGuidingPrinciples.pdf](https://vcportal.ventura.org/covid19/docs/pr/2020-08-19_VCPH_SchoolDistrictGuidingPrinciples.pdf).

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