

**COVID-19:**

# **Howell Mountain Elementary School District Reopening Plan**

**Fall 2020**



**V. 08.03.2020**



## SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Howell Mountain Elementary Staff, Students, and Families,

The last trimester of the school year, under the Shelter-in-Place order and ever-changing conditions, tested our resilience and ability to adjust. Our school was swiftly shut down on March 16th while we, along with Districts throughout the County, rapidly implemented virtual teaching and learning. Repeated change was the only constant among many uncertainties and unknowns. Our dedicated employees navigated constantly modified Public Health Orders, cleaning protocols, distance learning methods, mass food distribution for families in our community, and a safe graduation celebration.

Over the last several weeks, our District explored the guidelines from many agencies, including the California Department of Education, American Academy of Pediatrics, California Department of Public Health, and Napa County Public Health. We have been in constant communications with the County superintendents, legislators, and public health representatives from throughout the State. It is by everyone's sedulous and conscientious efforts we present our Reopening Plan designed so students can return to the 2020-2021 School Year on August 19, 2020. Howell Mountain will utilize the first week of school to schedule 1:1 appointments with each family and child and their teacher. At this time, students will be issued a computer, textbooks and learning platforms will be modeled and explained. Students will also participate in preliminary academic assessments, which will be used to inform our academic instruction. School schedules will officially begin on August 26, 2020.

Among the many ideas and options we have considered, the health and well-being of our staff, students, and families is realized in every aspect of the plan. The Reopening Plan's success is dependent on everyone's support, most importantly our employees and our families/caregivers who side-by-side care deeply about the safety and education of the children. The Plan depends on an effective implementation of both the instructional model and safety guidelines. By respecting the precautions set forth to ensure the safety of ourselves and others, I am confident we will collectively make the Plan a success as we continue to comply with the state and county guidelines in the ever-evolving impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Janet Tufts

## Maximizing Children’s Health

Multiple reports from around the world indicate that children account for less than 5-10% of COVID-19 infections. Evidence is mounting that children may be less susceptible to COVID-19 infection and may be less likely to transmit the virus to others, per the recently released publication by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), there is also strong evidence that the majority of children who become infected with COVID-19 are either asymptomatic or have only mild symptoms, such as cough, fever, and sore throat. While serious disease requiring hospitalization is known in children, including multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), this is relatively rare and is generally treatable in a small minority of pediatric cases. The clinical course is much less severe than in adults and deaths are uncommon.

Without a doubt, the public health measures of school closures, sheltering-in-place orders and self-isolation, implemented to mitigate COVID-19 and “flatten the curve” have saved lives. However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, these measures also have adverse consequences on children, including unfavorable impact on children’s behavior and mental health.

## Minimizing Individual and Public Health Risks

In a typical year, returning to school has generally been associated with increases in cases of community-associated seasonal respiratory viral infections. As a result, it is anticipated this year that there will likely be an increase in cases of COVID-19 upon the reopening of schools and as such, the appropriate measures will be proactively put in place to mitigate the effects of such an increase. This includes the need for readily available testing and contact tracing support within Napa County, which is critical to avoid cluster or widespread outbreaks.

Consistency is essential for children and it will be important to ensure that once children return to school, that schools stay open to the extent possible. Children rely on structure and schedule for stability.

With these two broad ideas in mind - maximizing benefit for students while also minimizing risk to the adults who work with students - HMESD’s reopening plan summarizes our recommendations based on the

available evidence as of the publishing of this plan as well as in consultation with our employees who have served on important reopening committees. The recommendations are organized into the following categories:

1. Screening
2. Hand hygiene
3. Face covering
4. Physical distancing
5. Cohorting
6. Disinfecting
7. Ventilation
8. Student Nutrition
9. Reopening Classrooms to In-Person Instruction
10. Option for Virtual-only Instruction
11. Mental health
12. Safety Measures for Staff
13. Limiting Visitors and Volunteers
14. Communicating

## Screening

Screening is often done to prevent symptomatic individuals from entering a school or workplace. Typical screening may include taking temperature with a non-touch thermometer or using a questionnaire for symptoms or exposure. Students may not attend school if they have a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher.

In order to prevent the spread of infection, students, teachers and other employees who have signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are advised to stay home until they are symptom free and/or until they have a negative test for COVID-19. Decisions about testing and returning to school, including those who have had an exposure to COVID-19, will be guided by Public Health recommendations.

- Upon initial reopening, students will be screened with a questionnaire for symptoms.
- Once school has reopened, parents and caregivers will be empowered to do a daily screening for symptoms of COVID-19 using screening protocols against a provided checklist before arriving at school. In addition, daily temperature readings will be taken throughout the day.
- Symptomatic students and employees who report to school will be asked to return home.

- School staff will watch for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 so that appropriate action can be taken if anyone develops symptoms during the day.
- Virtual learning will be available for children who are required to stay home because they are sick or in isolation due to COVID-19 infection or exposure and for students whose families prefer to keep their children home during the pandemic.

### Hand Hygiene

COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses are almost exclusively spread by respiratory droplet transmission. As a result, and because virus shedding may occur prior to symptom onset or in the absence of symptoms, routine, frequent and proper hand hygiene (soap and water or hand sanitizer) is critical to limit transmission. Hand hygiene is one of the most effective strategies to prevent the spread of most respiratory viruses including the coronavirus, particularly during the pre-symptomatic phase of the illness.

- Students will be taught how to clean their hands properly (with age-appropriate lessons) and to try to avoid touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth. Lessons and reminders with students will be non-judgemental and positive.
- Students and staff will be taught about respiratory etiquette; students and staff who have any symptoms of illness will stay home. All will be reminded to sneeze or cough into their elbow/ sleeve.
- There will be age-appropriate signage placed throughout the school to remind students to wash or sanitize hands.
- All students will have access to hand sanitizer and/or sinks with soap throughout the day and will have frequent reminders to wash or sanitize their hands.
- A regular schedule for routine hand hygiene will be in place for younger students with scheduled hand hygiene breaks.

The preferred method for these hand hygiene breaks may be the use of hand sanitizer unless sinks are readily available in or nearby the classroom. Hand sanitizer will be available at the entry point for each classroom.

- Liquid soap and hand sanitizer will be replenished and paper towels available for drying.
- Restrooms will be equipped with no touch faucets.

- Disinfecting spray and paper towels will be available for teachers and able helpers to wipe down commonly used surfaces.



### Face Coverings

The current State guidelines require the use of face coverings. However, the American Association of Pediatrics and our Napa County Public Health officer note that face coverings for our youngest students may pose a challenge. Face coverings for K–2 will be optional. All staff and 3-8 students will be expected to comply with face coverings.

- Students will use face coverings provided from home. If parents are unable to provide a face covering, the school staff can assist in obtaining one.
- Individual exceptions may be made for students with conditions where wearing a face covering is not advised.
- Employees may use face coverings provided from home or use a face covering or clear face shield provided by HMESD, if available.
- Young students will be taught the reason for and proper use of a face covering.
- Students will learn about appropriate procedures for putting on, taking off, and storing the face covering (i.e. during meal times, snack times).
- Each school will maintain a supply of non-medical masks in the event that a student or staff member needs a replacement during the day.



### Physical Distancing

The objective of physical distancing is to reduce the likelihood of contact that may lead to transmission and has been a widely used strategy during the pandemic. Social Distancing will be 4-6 feet of separation from all individuals.

### Classrooms

- Classroom furniture is to be arranged to spread student seating as much as possible.
- When weather permits, classes may be conducted outside to promote both physical distancing and fresh air ventilation.
- Acrylic partitions will be utilized in classrooms where students are not required to wear face coverings.

### Large gatherings/assembly

- Large gatherings/assemblies will not be held in the foreseeable future.
- Singing, drama, band, and other practices/performances pose a higher level of risk. The District will adhere to suggested guidelines regarding activities. Special consideration will be given to room ventilation, the use of outdoor space, and the distance between students. To the extent possible, instruments and athletic equipment or other objects will not be shared between students, and if sharing is required, the objects will be disinfected between use.

### Lunch breaks

- To minimize risk of group transmission and maintain physical distancing, break and lunch times may be staggered and modified to 30 minute intervals to limit unstructured play.

- When weather permits, consideration will be given to having lunch or snack breaks in the classroom or outside.
- Hand hygiene will be performed prior to and after breakfast and lunch breaks.

### Outdoor and other activities

- Playground structures will be closed until further notice.
- During outdoor activities, such as recess, physical distancing will be encouraged within the cohort.
- Students will perform hand hygiene before and after outdoor play. To the extent possible, equipment or other objects will not be shared between students, and if sharing is required, the objects will be disinfected between use.
- Physical education classes are encouraged and can continue under health and safety protocols.



### Cohorting

The purpose of establishing cohorts is to limit the mixing of students and staff so that if anyone develops an infection, the number of exposures is reduced. It will not be feasible to maintain stable cohorts in all settings, but every effort will be made to create as stable cohorts as possible.

- Students will be assigned to one classroom as a stable cohort which will enable each group of students to consistently work together with little or no mingling with other cohorts on campus.



## Disinfecting

In order to disinfect high-touch surfaces regularly to minimize the risk of exposure, each classroom and workspace will have access to paper towels and spray bottles of disinfectant.

- Older students and teachers will have ready access to wipe down light switches, door knobs, desk surfaces, shared objects, and any other high touch surfaces within the classroom.
- Younger students will be taught to avoid sharing objects and will focus on hand hygiene with regular breaks. The teacher in the classroom will have ready access to disinfecting spray and paper towels to use, as needed, throughout the day.

## Ventilation

Properly installed and maintained Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioner (HVAC) systems are key to ensuring healthy indoor air quality in school learning environments. Research continues to add to the evolving knowledge that environmental conditions and airflow influence the transmissibility of COVID-19.

- HVAC systems will be set to operate at a minimum of one hour before occupancy to “flush” rooms.
- High-efficiency air filters, as per manufacturer's recommendations, will be installed and replaced frequently.
- The use of outdoor space or environments with windows or other cross-ventilation options will be encouraged.





### Student Nutrition

A successful nutrition program is a key component of every educational environment. A child cannot focus on learning when they are feeling hungry. School meals boost learning, and studies show that students perform best academically when well-nourished. Therefore, ensuring every child has access to healthy meals in schools is extremely important.

During this time of managing the spread of the coronavirus, the following adjustments will be made:

- Menus will continue to follow the National School Lunch Program guidelines, sourced with available products through approved and vetted vendors.
- Meals may be served and consumed in the classroom, cafeteria/multi-purpose room, or outdoors.
- Healthy and fresh menu options that are individually boxed or plated will be served, with pre-portioned produce and pre-wrapped entree items.
- Meal times may be staggered to allow for cleaning between meal services and to serve students in smaller groups.
- Offsite meal service (with approved USDA waivers) may allow the District to offer grab-and-go student meals for consumption at home, including drive-through or curbside pick-up options.

### Re-opening Classrooms to In-Person Learning

HMESD has created a phased in-person school model to safely engage students in meaningful academic and social-emotional learning. By establishing schedules, structures, practices, and clear expectations we will be able to implement successful in-person learning to resume as soon as public health guidelines and health expectations warrant a safe return to school.



### Learning Options

#### In-Person

In the fall, students in K-8 will begin in Phase 1 of our 4 phase plan. Phase one will be distance learning. Students may return to school for a modified day, two days a week when we are in phase 2 and 5 days per week in phase 3. Our county will be required to be off of the state monitoring list for 14 consecutive days prior to entering phase 2. Phase 2 will allow our staff and students time to transition safely to a 5 day model. Students will be assigned to a stable classroom cohort, or group, adhering to all the health and safety guidelines contained in this document. A stable classroom cohort will remain together, to the extent possible, with the same teacher and student group throughout the day. Operational adjustments to the daily school schedule will include staggered and shortened recess and lunch breaks. While all the strategies are important to reduce the risk of transmission, stable cohorting is a primary scheduling strategy for our elementary students.

Should an infection occur, the District will follow County Public Health guidance to quarantine an entire cohort, or close an entire school, to reduce further transmission. Should this occur, parents/caregivers will receive information about the exposure and the anticipated length of time for quarantine or closure. If this occurs, the teacher and students would temporarily revert to virtual learning. In a closure event, every attempt will be made to communicate information about the process and schedule for virtual learning. The start day and time will accommodate time to provide distance learning tools, access, and teacher preparation for an instructional design change if needed. If a teacher becomes sick, a substitute teacher will cover either the in-person or virtual instruction at that time.

### Distance Learning Option

Families may choose to have their students continue with distance learning. Teachers are equipped to record lessons while students virtually attend class at the same time as their classmates. Schedules and learning materials will be provided for students and families.

### Hybrid Learning Option (Phase 2)

A hybrid option will be implemented in cases where grade level enrollment exceeds social distancing protocols. In the hybrid model, students will attend a modified block schedule of approximately three hours each day. Each group of students will have two consecutive days a week of in-person/on-site instruction and three days a week of virtual learning with approximately one hour of live teacher time plus three hours of independent work each of those days.

Should an infection occur, the District will follow County Public Health guidance to quarantine an entire cohort, or close an entire school, to reduce further transmission. Should this occur, parents/caregivers will receive information about the exposure and the anticipated length of time for quarantine or closure. If this occurs, the teacher and students would temporarily revert to complete virtual learning.

### Independent Study

*Families who choose to learn from home at their own pace may choose an Independent Study Contract. HMESD will provide curriculum that may be completed at the student's own pace. If families choose this option, students will still be held accountable for school-wide and state-wide assessments.*



### Special Education

Students currently eligible for special education services will continue to receive their service(s) congruent with their general education plan. This may mean some adjustments to the current Individualized Education Program (IEP), to ensure students continue to receive services during COVID-19 changes in general education programs. IEP team meetings and assessments will resume in when school begins.



### Safety Measures for Employees

***The safety of District employees is an important consideration in our reopening. Risk mitigation for teachers and other staff are similar to those recommended for other essential workers. Staff will be encouraged to follow all guidelines mentioned above, including hand hygiene, disinfecting, and symptom monitoring. Stable cohorts, physical distancing, and face coverings continue to be the primary means to reduce the risk of transmission.***

***Physical distancing of the school staff from children and other staff will be practiced. A 6 foot of social distance will be adhered to.***

- ***Adults will wear cloth or other face coverings. The District will also provide clear face shields as an additional form of protection. Face shields are not recommended as a replacement for face coverings given concerns over their ability to minimize droplet spread to others. Teachers may consider using face shields when physically distant from students in certain limited situations: during phonological instruction to enable students to see the teacher's mouth and in settings where a cloth face covering poses a barrier to communicating with a student who is hearing impaired. In most instances, a face shield provides an additional barrier for a staff member who is also wearing a face covering.***

- ***Staff will be informed about symptoms of COVID-19 and are encouraged to self-monitor for symptoms and stay home if they have any.***

- ***Staff will receive information about the use of available leaves related to COVID-19.***

- ***Specific personnel may be equipped with additional PPE, depending on the level of interactions with members of the public and their specific job duties.***



## Safety Measures Continued

Front office will have a clear partition as a means of separating the public from the office staff.

## Volunteers

In order to reduce the number of interactions at each campus, visitors will be limited. Parents and caregivers will have limited access to the front office but will be restricted from other parts of the building. All volunteer activity will be suspended until further notice.

## Communicating

Clear, age-appropriate information about COVID-19 will be available to staff, students, and parents/caregivers upon school reopening. HMESD will incorporate regular updates to our school community throughout the school year.

## Sources

- *American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Guidance Covid-19 Planning Considerations Return to in-Person Education-in-schools/ (updated June 25, 2020)*
- *Association of California School Administrators: School Reopening Report (Issued May 28, 2020).*
- *California Department of Education Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools (Issued June 8, 2020).*
- *California Department of Public Health Guidance for Schools (Issued June 5, 2020).*
- *The California School Boards Association: The Uncertain Road Ahead (Issued June 9, 2020).*
- *California County Superintendents Educational Services Association School Reopening Guide (Issued June 2, 2020).*
- *Napa County Office of Education, Considerations for Reopening Schools During COVID-19 Pandemic (Issued June 1, 2020)*

## Summary

This document provides guidance about HMESD's plan for reopening school and measures to mitigate risks related to the spread of COVID-19. Although research is still being completed about the minimal experience of COVID-19 infection and transmission in children, our sources along with staff and community members discuss and urge the consideration for the harm school closure has on the educational progress and the physical and mental well-being of students. As schools reopen, the District is also mindful of the physical and mental well-being of our staff, and the importance that regular schooling has on each household. It is the HMESD's intention to consider all our stakeholders and to articulate the rationale for the recommendations contained in this document in order to help reduce the fear and anxiety in parents/caregivers, students, and school staff. Upon our students' return to school, the setting and environment will not be as it was prior to the outbreak. Due to the safety measures, social interactions among children will be limited and the classroom community will look quite different. Our children's social-emotional well-being depends upon adjustment to that new classroom experience.

Teacher preparation and instructional time will be more cumbersome considering the classroom configuration and need to convey expectations for and monitor hygiene and respiratory etiquette. It is predictable that instructional time to focus on standards will be impacted. Other important factors to consider are inequalities in the social and economic burden of COVID-19, which may further disadvantage students where educational inequality and barriers to virtual learning may be more pronounced. In addition, we appreciate that the living conditions for children vary across socioeconomic groups and therefore recommend that further work be done to develop guidance and identify supports needed for situations where children reside within the same home as individuals with underlying conditions that put them at increased risk of more severe disease.

Finally, it is important to note that these recommendations reflect the evidence available at the present time and may evolve as new evidence emerges and as information is gathered from other jurisdictions that have opened schools already.

## Reopening FAQs

### ***When schools reopen, will students be required to wear face coverings?***

The Public Health Order has changed over time and the State and County orders haven't always aligned. According to current State guidelines, anyone over 2 years old is asked to wear a face covering. Unless this guidance changes, students will wear a face covering provided from home. Exceptions can be made if a student has an identified health or emotional condition related to the use of a face covering. There may be accommodations for using a face shield as an example. In Napa County, exemptions for using a face covering include: anyone who has trouble breathing, is incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance; anyone who has been advised by a medical professional not to wear a face-covering; any worker to the extent wearing a face-covering creates a safety hazard at work under established health and safety guidelines. The Napa County Public Health Officer has amended this order to make face covering optional for K-2 students.

***Will the schools be doing a hybrid system (part in-person/part online)?*** Our reopening plan, as of this publication, is for in-person and/ or a hybrid model if classroom enrollment exceeds the capacity to provide a 4-6' social distance barrier.

### ***Will students receive a pass/fail in the Fall?***

HMESD will return to a regular standards mastery grading system for our students.

***For students with an IEP in need of several services through Special Education, how will speech, occupational therapy, academic help, and behavioral services be addressed?***

We are required to provide services to our students as identified in each student's IEP. Our case managers and Special Education department have been busy identifying services that were provided remotely during sheltering and services that will resume in-person.

### ***What are the options for parents/caregivers who don't feel comfortable sending their children back to school?***

HMESD will have a virtual-only program option for students. Parents/caregivers will be able to enroll their child(ren) in the virtual-only program.

***Will we see band in the Fall?*** Due to health concerns, Band will be virtual.

***Besides face coverings and physical distancing, what plans are in place to ensure staff and student safety, in regards to things like cleaning and lunchtime?*** We will continue to reinforce the importance of hand hygiene and etiquette for coughing and sneezing. We

will ensure adequate supplies to support hand hygiene. Staff and students will wear face coverings and/or face shields. Staff will conduct regular disinfecting daily of high touch surfaces. We will also limit shared items such as playground equipment and sporting equipment. Where items need to be shared, the items will be disinfected between uses. We are aware that ventilation is important, so doors and windows will be open, whenever possible, and gathering outdoors is encouraged.

