

Guidelines for School Decision Making

This document from the North Shore Health Department is intended to provide schools and school districts with an understanding of what the COVID-19 burden and risk means within their communities to allow them to make informed decisions about moving between different learning models. The guidelines below offer recommendations for when to shift between learning models based on COVID-19 community risk level, but schools and school districts must make the final determination based on their own reopening plans and what is feasible for them. Additionally, the decision to change between learning models may be driven by specific COVID-19 case investigations and outbreaks. The burden thresholds are based on the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services COVID-19 Activity Level](#) determinations and [Harvard Global Health Institute's Path to Zero & Schools: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces](#). As public health learns more about transmission of COVID-19 in schools and communities, these guidelines may be updated.

Table 1. Recommendations Based on Metrics				
COVID-19 Burden Level (Community Transmission Status)	COVID-19 Burden Thresholds (new cases per 100,000 in the past 14 days)	Recommended Learning Models		
		Virtual	Hybrid (Blended Learning)	In-Person (5 days/week)
Low - Green	≤10 cases per 100,000			X
Moderate - Yellow	10≤50 cases per 100,000		X <i>Physically distanced</i>	X <i>Physically distanced</i>
Moderately High - Orange	50≤100 cases per 100,000		X <i>Physically distanced</i>	X – assuming criteria in Table 2 are green. <i>Physically distanced Students in cohorts</i>
High - red	100≤350 cases per 100,000	X <i>At minimum, virtual option is offered for all students</i>	X – assuming criteria in Table 2 are green. <i>Physically distanced Exercise caution</i>	
Critical - Purple	>350 cases per 100,000	X		

Metric indicators should be at a threshold for a minimum of 14 days before considering moving to the next phase.
Physically distanced- as best as possible given school or district resources.

Table 2. Additional Criteria for Determining Learning Models	
Metric	Threshold for Criteria Being Met
Percent Positivity	Green – at or below 5% positivity rate (14-day period)
	Yellow – 5-10% positivity rate (14-day period) and trending downward
Cases	Municipal/School District COVID-19 cases trending downward North Shore COVID-19 cases trending downward
Care	Percent of hospitals NOT in crisis care and percent of hospital beds available is NOT nearing capacity – Milwaukee County Level.

Recommendations for schools are based on the following metrics:

1. **COVID-19 Burden:** The number of COVID-19 cases in a 14-day period computed as a rate per 100,000 population, which allows for comparison between communities.
 - a. Critical Case rate is greater than 350
 - b. High Case rate is greater than 100 but less than or equal to 350.
 - c. Moderately High Case rate is greater than 50, but less than or equal to 100.
 - d. Moderate Case rate is greater than 10, but less than or equal to 50.
 - e. Low Case rate is less than or equal to 10.
2. **Percent Positivity:** The percent of COVID-19 tests conducted during a time period that were resulted as positive. Multiple public health sources indicate that 5% or lower is ideal for permitting schools to meet in person.
3. **COVID-19 Cases:** The 14-day trend in percent positive COVID-19 test results. This metric aligns with the Burden of COVID Status but describes the trending of positive cases and not just the rate. This metric is available on the North Shore Health Department's website and is provided as a weekly report to the North Shore area school districts.
4. **Care:** Percentage of hospitals not in crisis care and percent of hospital beds available. We know that hospitalization is a lagging indicator from cases, but an important metric that indicates the severity of disease within the community. This metric is available on the Milwaukee County COVID-19 Dashboard.

Learning Models Defined:

- **In-Person** – The vast majority of students attend school in-person. Some students with health concerns may participate virtually on an as-needed basis. Infection prevention measures are still in place, including having students in cohorts whenever possible.
- **Hybrid (Blended Learning)** – Schools may provide instruction using a combination of in-person and virtual learning environments.
- **Virtual** – All students attend virtually using various instructional strategies.

Data availability:

- County level data will continue to be available on the Milwaukee County COVID-19 Dashboard (<https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Office-of-Emergency-Management>). NOTE: you will need to access the full-screen version to toggle between the data and the key indicators.
- Municipal level data on the burden of COVID-19 status and percent positivity will be available on a weekly basis.
- A combination of county and municipal data should be used to guide decisions based on the fluidity of municipal borders, open-enrollment of students from other communities, as well as the reality that faculty and staff may live in other communities.