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# Clarification of Adaptive Pause Guidance for Schools, K-12

October 16, 2020

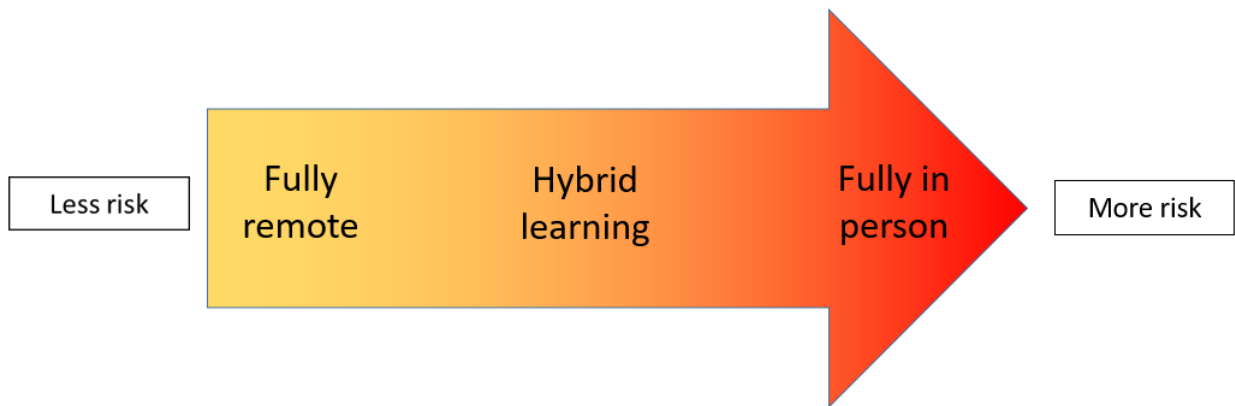
## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help clarify the Illinois Department of Public Health’s (IDPH’s) Adaptive Pause Guidance on the role of metrics in school districts’ decision-making related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The information in this document is taken primarily from [IDPH’s Adaptive Pause Guidance](#), and also incorporates some elements of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) document “[Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making](#)”.

## Types of Information for Decision-Making

Presently, schools in suburban Cook County may be conducting learning activities in one or more of the following modalities, which can be considered on the following risk continuum:



In addition to the specific local needs of each school district during the COVID-19 pandemic, several other, different layers of information are recommended for school administrators to consider when making decisions to move between learning modalities listed on the continuum shown above. These layers are the following:

1. Recent or Ongoing Transmission in a School(s)

A school with documented recent or ongoing transmission (within the school setting) must work closely with Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) and follow any instructions provided to stop further transmission. A school with an outbreak can expect recommendations from CCDPH on opening and closing that will depend on the specific circumstances at a given school.

2. Data that inform Minimal/Moderate/Substantial Community Transmission

Metrics and other data to inform the process of categorizing community transmission are available on CCDPH's COVID-19 data website (<https://ccdphcd.shinyapps.io/covid19>), under the "School Metrics" tab. These metrics are provided to mirror the metrics outlined in the table "Metric Guidance for Local Health Departments to Prompt Discussion with School Officials" from the Adaptive Pause guidance. This table is reproduced on the following page.

Table 1. Metric Guidance for Local Health Departments to Prompt Discussion with School Officials

	Minimal Community Transmission	Moderate Community Transmission	Substantial Community Transmission
County-Level Metric	Alert for 1 metric but remained BLUE at any point in the last 4 weeks	Transitioned to ORANGE once in the last 4 weeks	Remained in ORANGE for $\geq 2$ consecutive weeks
	Weekly county case rates $\leq 50$ per 100,000	Weekly county case rates $> 50$ to $\leq 100$ per 100,000	Weekly county case rates above $> 100$ per 100,000
	Weekly county overall case numbers increase for 2 consecutive weeks with a $> 5\%$ to $\leq 10\%$ increase occurring each week	Weekly county overall case numbers increase for two consecutive weeks with a $> 10\%$ or $\leq 20\%$ increase occurring each week	Weekly county overall case numbers increase for two consecutive weeks with a $> 20\%$ increase occurring each week
	Weekly county youth case numbers increase for two consecutive weeks with a $> 5\%$ to $\leq 10\%$ increase occurring each week	Weekly county youth case numbers increase for two consecutive weeks with a $> 10\%$ or $\leq 20\%$ increase occurring each week	Weekly county youth case numbers increase for two consecutive weeks with a $> 20\%$ increase occurring each week
	Weekly test positivity $\leq 5\%$	Weekly test positivity $> 5\%$ but $\leq 8\%$	Weekly test positivity $> 8\%$
Regional Resurgence Metric			Region moved to Tier 1 mitigation

### 3. Self-assessment of Schools' Ability to Implement and Maintain Mitigation Strategies

Five of these strategies are considered 'core' strategies by CDC, which are as follows:

- Consistent and correct use of masks
- Physical distancing of at least 6 feet to the largest extent possible
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and disinfection
- Contact tracing in collaboration with CCDPH

Though the core strategies described above are the highest priority, schools should attempt to implement all possible mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Other mitigation strategies mentioned by CDC include, but are not limited to, cohorting, staying home when appropriate, ensuring adequate supplies, staggered and alternate scheduling, not sharing objects, limiting visitors, water system safety, physical barriers and guides, closing communal spaces, and modifications to ventilation systems and food services.

### **Risk-based Decision-making and Learning Modalities**

The following information is provided in order to assist school administrators in making decisions. Instructions provided during temporary periods of ongoing school-based transmission notwithstanding, these are recommendations, not requirements. School officials who determine that their schools are unable to carry out their normal operations, including, but not limited to, student and/or faculty or staff absenteeism, unsafe physical conditions, or any other critical issues may choose to close and reopen as necessary and at their discretion.

Irrespective of data on community transmission or a school's ability to implement and maintain mitigation strategies, schools with outbreaks are advised to work closely with the Cook County Department of Public Health to stop ongoing transmission.

In the absence of ongoing transmission, schools should use data on community transmission as well as its ability (based on self-assessment) to implement and maintain mitigation strategies in order to determine its ideal learning modalities based on risk categories: High risk, medium risk, or low risk.

### **High risk**

If suburban Cook County meets the criteria for substantial community transmission according to the criteria outlined in Table 1 above and schools experience difficulties implementing and maintaining core mitigation strategies, together these would indicate the school is at high risk for transmission. Schools with in-person learning either predominating or as part of a hybrid model must **strongly consider** alternative learning modalities including moving to remote-only instruction as quickly as feasible.

If suburban Cook County meets the criteria for substantial community transmission according to the criteria outlined in Table 1 but a school has successfully implemented and maintained core mitigation strategies, this would still be considered high risk. Schools with in-person learning either predominating or as part of a hybrid model should consider moving to remote only-instruction out of an abundance of caution. If schools opt to continue in-person instruction, CCDPH recommends schools conduct more frequent (e.g., daily or twice-weekly) self-risk assessments and pay strict attention to the possibility of school-related transmission. Any suspected or confirmed cases in students, faculty, or staff must be reported to CCDPH immediately.

### **Medium risk**

If suburban Cook County meets the criteria for moderate community transmission according to the criteria outlined in Table 1 above and schools are successful in implementing and maintaining all core mitigation strategies, in person instruction predominating or as part of a hybrid model would be considered medium risk. Schools should remain vigilant and refine plans for moving to reduced hybrid modalities or to full remote if suburban Cook County moves to substantial community transmission.

If suburban Cook County meets the criteria for moderate community transmission according to the criteria outlined in Table 1 above and schools are not successful in implementing and maintaining core mitigation strategies, in person instruction predominating or as part of a hybrid model would be considered medium risk. In addition to remaining vigilant and refining plans for moving to reduced hybrid or fully remote modalities, schools must actively work to uncover root causes why core mitigation strategies have not been successful and should pilot ways to improve. School

administrators should carefully consider moving to full remote instruction if these mitigation strategies fail to improve (we recommend weekly assessments) out of an abundance of caution.

### **Low Risk**

Minimal community transmission and successful implementation and maintenance of core mitigation strategies or Illinois moving into Phase 5 of the Restore Illinois Plan both indicate low risk.

A decision tree to help determine learning modality is provided in the Appendix.

### **Other considerations**

#### Mixed categories

It is likely that at any given time, suburban Cook County may have metrics that rest in multiple categories according to Table 1. When this occurs, CCDPH encourages school administrators to consider approaching decision-making from a more conservative viewpoint (i.e. electing lower risk learning modalities).

#### Timing related to community transmission categories

It is unlikely that suburban Cook County will move, for example, from minimal community transmission to substantial community transmission from one week to another. Part of the reason we recommend using data from IDPH is because those data are based on rolling averages and are smoothed, thereby reducing abrupt changes.

#### Avoid over-reliance on hyperlocal data

Though we encourage data-based decision making, we advise against over-reliance on hyperlocal data, such as zip code data. Hyperlocal data, by definition, are not reflective of the risks to faculty and staff who may live outside a school's catchment area (that may be the focus of hyperlocal data). Additionally, in hyperlocal areas with small numbers of cases, weight given to percent changes may be exaggerated even if they are mathematically correct. Further, atypical events (e.g., a one-day

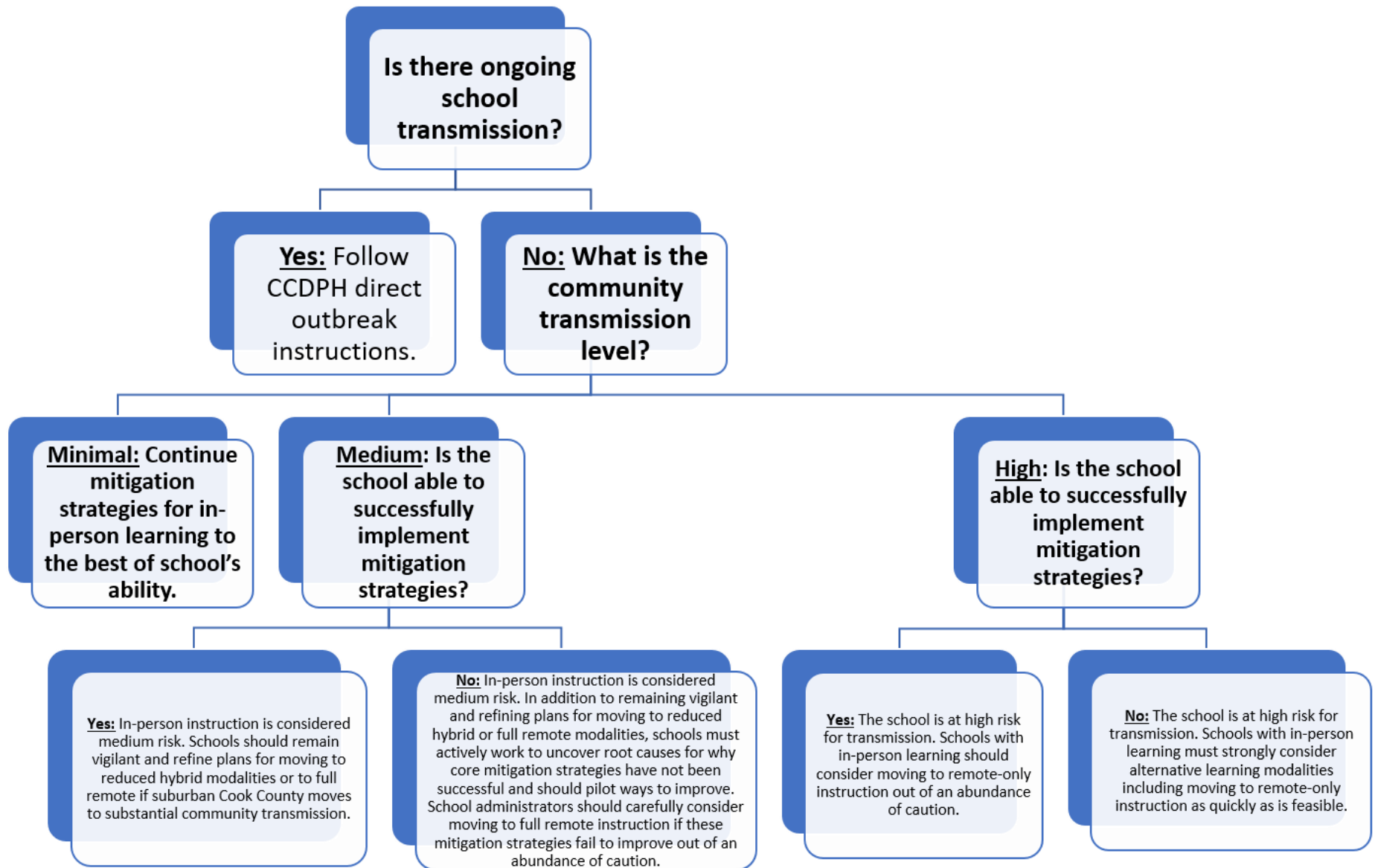
testing drive or event) can have a significant, temporary effect on trends that are not reflective of true risk in the community.

CCDPH provides school metrics data for suburban Cook County overall (Oak Park, Evanston, Skokie, and Stickney Township notwithstanding) and by our [four public health districts](#) in order to provide a more localized snapshot. Again, though, even at this level, data may represent too narrow a view.

With these points in mind, we encourage school administrators to consider data metrics presented at the region/county level (as described in the Adaptive Pause guidance) and if this conflicts with more localized data (i.e. CCDPH public health district), to again approach decision-making with a more conservative lens.

## Appendix: Guide for Determining Learning Modality

Required: community transmission level (see Table 1\*) and self-assessment of school's ability to implement mitigation strategies



\***Mixed categories:** It is likely that at any given time, suburban Cook County may have metrics that rest in multiple categories according to Table 1. When this occurs, CCDPH encourages school administrators to consider approaching decision-making from a more conservative viewpoint