



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 25, 2021

Contact: **Joel Aune, Executive Director**
Washington Association of School Administrators
800-859-9272
jaune@wasa-oly.org
www.wasa-oly.org

WASA Statement on Change in Social Distancing Guidelines for Schools

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee’s announcement today giving districts the option to move social distancing from six to three feet in schools will help bring more students back for in-person learning this spring and next fall, according to the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA).

WASA Executive Director Joel Aune said the additional flexibility on social distancing guidelines allows more schools to safely welcome more students back for in-person classroom instruction. In a [March 8 letter](#) to the governor and State Health Secretary Umair Shah, the association called for flexibility on this rule, based on a growing body of research supporting revised social distancing in schools. The CDC issued revised guidance on social distancing in schools on March 19.

“Today’s statement from Gov. Inslee is welcome news, particularly for those districts already positioned to bring more students back on campus for in-person learning,” said Aune. “Some districts will need more time to adjust and plan under this new guidance, though this development puts everyone on a pathway to more fully reopen schools for in-person learning by the fall.”

Aune said there are multiple factors that can impact a district’s ability to expand in-person learning at this time, including collective bargaining with school employee labor groups. For example, some districts may have recently completed formal agreements with teachers around a hybrid learning model. Increased in-person learning drives programming changes, which also impacts staffing levels and class scheduling, particularly at the secondary level.

“Districts and schools are also heavily engaged in planning for statewide assessments, end-of-school-year activities, graduation, and summer programming for student learning recovery,” said Aune. “The change in the social distancing requirement will also provide much-needed clarity for school districts as they focus on planning for next year as more students will be coming back for in-person learning. At the same time, others may indicate a preference for a continuation of remote learning opportunities. The combination of these factors all significantly impact a district’s ability and bandwidth to serve more students for in-person learning as the current school year comes to a close,” he added.

“While this change in the social distance requirements is wonderful news for schools and children, the challenges associated with this pivot are significant, far-reaching, and complex,” Aune said. “Some will get there this spring, while others will focus their efforts to ensure a positive and successful launch to the new school year next fall.”

Communities must also continue their diligence around hand washing, mask wearing and vaccinations to help contain community spread, and schools open, he said.

“We cannot overemphasize how important it is for everyone to follow public health measures,” said Aune. “The governor was very clear about the continued importance of the daily case counts and what that means for operating schools. We can and must do everything necessary to keep COVID at bay and students in school,” he said.

“Our state has made tremendous progress in the last few months. And now, with vaccinations soon extending to all people age 16 and older, we can begin to see a positive future. But it will take continued vigilance on everyone’s part to keep moving forward toward this positive future, together.”

About the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)

WASA (www.wasa-oly.org) is a non-profit organization committed to the development of quality education through professional leadership. Members benefit from a supportive community of professional leaders working to provide insightful, valuable training support, and resources. WASA also strives to sustain a positive impact on legislative and community leaders. Membership is open to education administrators in Washington state.