

Updated Air Quality Guidelines

Big Picture

- We are hearing from numerous experts that, in most cases, schools are one of the safest places to be.
- School districts are working with their local air quality management districts to identify resources for making school environments even safer when air quality is poor.
- This is a challenging and evolving issue. Local educational leaders are continuing to seek and act on the best information available.
- SCOE is working with legislators to create a statewide set of standards for air quality so that schools don't have to make these difficult decisions on their own.
- In updating air quality guidelines, we have sought the most accurate information possible by:
 - Consulting with air quality management districts
 - Consulting with the county public health department
 - Seeking data and guidance from Environmental Protection Agency and their Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit
 - Sharing information with other county offices of education and school districts

Equity

- In some cases, schools have the same as or better air quality than nearby homes.
- When school is closed, many children are left home unattended.
- At schools, student activity can be monitored.
- When school is closed, many children lose access to free and reduced lunch.
- Schools are encouraged to excuse absences for children with health concerns or for families who believe they can provide their children a safer environment at home.

Air Quality Monitoring

- Sonoma County school districts will use airnow.gov to monitor air quality.
- This is a change from the site that was used in the fall of 2018 (purpleair.com). That site was recommended at the time because of the localized and timely readings it provided.
- However, air quality and public health experts have advised that airnow.gov should be used for the following reasons:
 - [Airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov) is monitored by trained government operators
 - [Airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov)'s sensors are regularly checked and updated for accuracy. In contrast, Purple Air monitors are purchased by individuals and can be inaccurate
 - [Airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov) uses sophisticated algorithms to ensure accuracy. Purple Air has been shown to lose accuracy as air quality worsens. It can read up to 50 percent higher than airnow.gov.

Making Schools Cleaner Air Environments

- The EPA identifies schools as potential "cleaner air centers" where, if they are properly equipped, they can provide students or community with better air during a smoke event.
- Districts are working with their local air quality management districts to identify ways to make the school environment even safer when air quality is poor.

- Based on guidance from the EPA, air quality management districts, and the public health director, N95 masks are not recommended for children. Even small masks are not guaranteed to fit a child. Without a proper fit, the mask can create a false sense of security, causing more harm than good.