

# School ‘as usual’ is unlikely as Washington officials weigh options for next fall amid coronavirus pandemic

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## EDUCATION LAB

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Washington education officials are weighing at least seven scenarios for reopening schools next fall and say the status quo — a patchwork of distance learning models crafted by individual school districts — is “not a viable approach.”

The examples of how school could return range from resuming in-person learning as usual, to developing a new model of remote instruction. The “as usual” model is unlikely, state education department [documents suggest](#), without the creation and mass distribution of a vaccine or a drastic change in coronavirus transmission rates.

The state’s education department has launched a new [123-member work group](#) to study several options. The group, which met for the first time last week, includes a mix of school principals, education-

advocacy groups, union representatives, lawmakers and other government officials from across the state.

“If we can’t come back in our traditional model a bunch of this is going to happen at a distance again,” said state schools chief Chris Reykdal. “That’s what we’re trying to model with this larger work group. What does the fall and next year look like?”

Under one scenario, schools could rotate students through buildings so fewer are on campus at any given time. Another idea: bring students on campus for part of the time and offer remote instruction during days or hours when students are off-site.

Officials are also considering phasing in school openings by county or district, based on recommendations from public-health officials or the governor’s office. Students who aren’t allowed to return on time might learn remotely until it’s safe to learn in person.

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Some parents say they’re eager for school to resume — or, at minimum, know their school district’s plans for the fall. Many are concerned their children are falling behind because of coronavirus-related school closures: about 86% of parents said they have this worry, [according to a poll](#) of more than 880 Washington parents released Wednesday. The poll was conducted by a nonprofit education advocacy group called The Education Trust.

Some Washington teachers and families have also expressed interest in [extending the school calendar](#), a move that’s unlikely to happen soon, but it could ultimately help schools navigate a scenario where students attend class in shifts.

Some researchers predict schools will be among the [last public spaces to reopen](#), given how difficult it

might be to follow social distancing guidelines within school buildings.

**Public health data** will inform final decisions about reopening, Reykdal said.

Here are the options the state has presented for resuming school this fall:

1.
    1. School as usual
  
  1.
    2. Rotate students through school buildings for parts of the day or week
- 
1.
    3. Option 2, but with distance learning when students are at home
  
  1.
    4. Schools would re-open by district or county, depending on social distancing requirements from one place to another.
  
  1.
    5. Phase in re-opening, but with distance learning in places where schools can't open immediately
  
  1.
    6. Continue remote instruction as it is
  
  1.
    7. Create and implement a new form of remote instruction.

Much is unknown about how effectively children transmit the novel coronavirus, though they are mostly

spared from the disease's worst effects. But researchers have recently begun identifying children, including [at least one in Washington](#), with a mysterious inflammatory condition they suspect has links to the coronavirus. The illness seems to be rare, but more research is needed to understand its origins and possible transmission patterns.

The work group is expected to continue meeting in late May and early June. Based on its findings, the state's education department may release guidance to school districts by June 8.

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