

## NEWS

# Kitsap school districts won't rush to adopt new 3-feet social-distancing standards

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Published 12:10 p.m. PT Mar. 26, 2021

When Gov. Jay Inslee announced Thursday that the state would reduce K-12 school physical-distancing requirements from 6 to 3 feet, he said school districts could begin putting the new standard into practice immediately. By the fall, Inslee said all classrooms should be using the 3-foot-distancing model.

School districts in Kitsap and Mason counties aren't expected to rush into any decisions regarding adjustments to student distancing.

"I anticipate that some members of our public are going to assume with that change, we can immediately just begin running school normally, just like we did pre-pandemic," North Kitsap School District Superintendent Lauryann Evans said during Thursday's board meeting. "And the answer is: not exactly."

Bainbridge Island School District Superintendent Peter Bang-Knudsen shared the same sentiment when addressing board members Thursday. From hybrid scheduling to classroom setups, schools went from fully-remote learning to partial in-person learning under the premise that physical-distancing guidelines would remain static through the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

"We built our model on the assumption we are going to be 6 feet for the entire school year," Bang-Knudsen said. "We didn't build in essentially a release valve to go back to 3-feet social distancing. That wasn't on anyone's radar when we were building this model in October and November."

Now, district administrators, board members, union officials and other school leaders are left to deliberate their next moves.

"We need some time to review and discuss the new guidance," said Bremerton School District spokesperson Karen Bevers, pointing out that Bremerton High School and Mountain View Middle School Students are due to begin hybrid, in-person learning April 1. "We will be providing an update to our families next week."

Central Kitsap School District spokesman David Beil said board members would be discussing the updated distance requirements at a study session on March 31.

Evans, who said some teachers in her school district grew accustomed to carrying around pool noodles to help students maintain 6 feet of distancing, noted the 3-foot distancing guidelines come with some exceptions that require some problem-solving.

Student gatherings for lunchtime will be tricky for schools considering students must maintain 6 feet of distance because they need to take off masks to eat. Under those guidelines, most schools don't have lunch areas big enough to accommodate more than a couple hundred students eating at one time.

"It's a logistical hurdle," Evans said.

Since Inslee is giving school districts some leeway as far as when the 3-foot guidelines need to go into effect, Evans said she planned to talk with her executive team Friday to discuss possible timelines. With planning for the 2021-22 academic year already in the works, Evans questioned how much more tinkering the district should do with its current operational model over the final stretch of 2020-21.

"One of the things I learned early on in my career is that slow is smooth and smooth is ultimately fast," Evans said.

“We are going to continue with that slow and steady approach.