



CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

Office of the Secretary

November 4, 2020

Dear School Leaders:

Thank you for your strong and persistent leadership to serve our students during this extraordinary time. To assist with the ongoing efforts to safely reopen schools, I am writing to update you on the latest work to support school-centered COVID testing.

Update:

- **End of August: Secured State Partnership.** To help solve nationwide challenges with testing supply and to drive down costs, we [secured a contract](#) with PerkinElmer, an international diagnostics company, to double the state's testing capacity and drive down costs to approximately 20–40% of market rates.
- **Since Early September: Collected Practitioner Feedback.** We worked with the California Department of Education (CDE) and State Board of Education to collect feedback from practitioners through a survey and focus group.
 - **Survey:** From mid-September to the end of September, CDE led a survey of all local educational agencies (LEAs) in order to assess testing needs.
 - **Focus Group:** Based on suggestions from education stakeholder groups, we convened a focus group of practitioners representing superintendents, principals, teachers, and classified staff to provide qualitative information about the on-the-ground realities of school-centered testing.
 - **Impact:** The feedback informed key decisions regarding implementation of the PerkinElmer capacity, such as making tests self-administrable and ensuring tested individuals learn results first.
- **Late October: Began Onboarding Early Adopters.** To gather concrete operational feedback, we worked with education stakeholder groups to begin onboarding approximately 15 LEAs representing a wide variety of sizes, types, and geographic locations. The insights collected from onboarding the early adopters will further inform state support of school-centered testing.
- **End of October: Opened New Lab.** At the end of October, we completed construction of the new state laboratory to support the PerkinElmer partnership and [opened](#) the facility.

State Testing Capacity:

Based on the work outlined above, the state testing capacity will support local testing plans in the following ways:

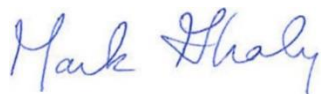
- All public schools in the state will be able to access capacity to support at least testing of all school staff at least once per month.
- Additional testing capacity will be available to support communities experiencing higher rates of community transmission and/or inequitable impacts of COVID.
- Test processing will be subject to a contractual turnaround time of 24-48 hours, LEAs will be able to secure tests at a fraction of the market rate, and the state will front costs and seek reimbursement through health plans.
- **Please Note:** LEAs may also use the \$5.3 billion in additional funds allocated in the Governor's 2020-21 Budget to pay for testing-related expenses (among other COVID-related expenses).

Next Steps:

- **Playbook.** Based on engagement over the last several months, the attached Playbook was developed to support testing sites, including schools, to take advantage of the state testing capacity summarized above. This is a working document and will be revised based on insights from the early adopters and others. Please review the Playbook in anticipation of the state testing capacity being made more widely accessible for schools. **Please find the Playbook attached.**
- **Scaling Up Adoption.** We will engage with education stakeholders over the next weeks to determine how to scale up the state testing capacity for schools as expeditiously and equitably as possible. We will incorporate insights from practitioners, early adopters, and other stakeholders into the plans.
- **Models and Best Practices.** We will also be publishing other information on models and best practices related to school-centered testing.

I hope this information is helpful and empowers you to plan ahead. Thank you again for both your leadership and partnership.

Sincerely,



Mark Ghaly MD, MPH
Secretary