

## **Knox County Education Coalition Recommended Community Criteria for Opening Schools During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Schools are vital institutions in the life of a community. They enhance children's social and emotional development, develop intellectual skills and abilities, and teach children to be citizens in a democracy. Schools are essential to the economy because they allow parents to work outside the home while also assuring children are under the protection of adults.

Nevertheless, sending children to schools under unsafe conditions endangers our children, school staff and our whole community. What happens inside schools is crucial, but it is socially and economically infeasible to operate in-person schools safely if the community has not adequately suppressed transmission of the virus.

Based on a review of criteria for when community activities can be safely conducted and when they must be curtailed, the KCEC recommends the following criteria based on the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) recommendations for when community conditions are suitable for safely operating in-person schools.

**With strong in-school health protection measures, in-person schools may reopen when the 14-day average new case rate is less than 10 per 100,000, AND:**

**The 14-day average new case rate is declining.**

**The positive test ratio is less than 3%.**

**Test results are available within 24 hours.**

Unfortunately, conditions in Knox County are far from meeting these criteria.

With 470,000 residents, meeting the first criterion requires a 14-day average new case rate of 46 or fewer new cases per day.

The new case rate is increasing not decreasing.

The current positive test ratio is about 10%.

On average test results do not become available for about 96 hours.

**The Knox County Education Coalition recommends that schools in Knox County be allowed to open for in-person classes only when the pandemic is under control in our county.**