

The Arkansas Department of Education expects its schools to follow their respective reopening plans, despite how many COVID-19 cases are in their community as classes are set to resume in fewer than five days.

During the state's daily briefing on the coronavirus pandemic, the Arkansas Center For Health Improvement, which has partnered with various state agencies, including the state Department of Education, revealed a new tool that rates the amount of risk of COVID-19 in each school district.

The tool, which is an expansion of its previous tracking mechanism, which tracked the number of cumulative and active cases per district, looks at cases recorded in the past 14 days and then tiered those cases by "risk factors"

The tiers go up from 0-9 cases per 10 thousand population to as high as 50 or more per 10 thousand population. According to the data itself, 19 school districts have more than 50 cases per 10 thousand people.

Dr. Joe Thompson, president of ACHI said this tool should not be used as a "indicator" for any active decision from a school to change its methods.

NEWS06**:12****"...risk situation"**

"It is a tiered risk indicator so that school districts can know, "Am I in a school district that I'm in a low risk situation, or am I in a school district that I'm in a high risk situation," Thompson said.

While a school district could be in a "high risk" tier, Secretary of Education Johnny Key said that does not mean schools should shift to virtual only education.

NEWS07**:15****"...data points"**

The state added 549 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the Arkansas's total to 54,765. Of those cases, 5,666 are considered active.