

St. Louis Area Superintendents
Return to School Work Group Suggested Practices

To maintain consistency among area school districts, a sub-group of area superintendents met weekly with health care professionals and health department personnel to develop the following guidance with regard to returning to school.

Introduction:

Schools in our community were impacted in an unprecedented way by the emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the causative agent of COVID-19. As we have moved through this pandemic, we have learned that children are less vulnerable to infection and are unlikely to become seriously ill with COVID-19. The profound negative impact of loss of in person schooling on the well-being of children has been well-documented and thus we are prepared to return to school for the 2020-2021 school year.

However, we must be attentive to the fact that this public health crisis has not ended. Adults, particularly those who are older and those with underlying health conditions, are at increased risk of serious illness from COVID-19. We need to prepare our schools to reduce the chances that any child or adult will acquire the infection during the school day and be armed with a protocol to respond to a case of infection in a school. We should be poised to adapt to new information as it emerges, so that we can create the safest and most robust educational experience possible. Although planning for this “new normal” may create some inconveniences, if we work together as a community, we can increase the chances that our students, staff and faculty will stay healthy and we will reduce the chance of significant educational disruptions.

This document is categorized into “must” and “may” sections. It is important to note that districts may choose to implement plans differently, based on local Board and leadership decisions or due to guidelines established by local government authorities. These guidelines were established with the current known factors and suggested guidelines. “Must” and “May” items may need to be re-categorized if conditions should change.

General Parameters/Suggestions:

- Establish a plan for daily screening for illness or exposure to the novel coronavirus
- Minimize interaction – stagger lunch times, arrival and departure times
- Keep students physically distanced in a classroom, to the extent possible
- Avoid large gatherings that mix multiple groups and do not allow for social distancing. For the short-term, avoid assemblies and pep rallies.
- Consider ways to minimize contact such as a 4-day school week, alternative scheduling options and reducing movement between classrooms.

Screening-Staff

Schools Must:

- Implement a health screening for all staff reporting to work.

Schools May:

- Administer a daily self-assessment before or when reporting to work, without taking temperature at work. Questions on the self-assessment should ask if the staff member has had otherwise unexplained onset of fever, cough, chills, shortness of breath, muscle pain, sore throat or loss of taste or smell; or has been in close contact in the past 2 weeks with an individual with a confirmed case of COVID-19. If a staff member answers “Yes” to any of the screening questions, he/she should not report to work.
- Implement random temperature checks to reinforce the practice of self-screening.
- Conduct temperature check and administer screening questions when staff member reports to work.

Screening-Students

Schools Must:

- Implement a health screening for all students reporting to school.

Schools May:

- Establish a protocol for parents to screen their own children before sending to school. This would include a temperature check and screening questions similar to those administered to staff.
- Take temperatures of students as they enter the building and require parents to complete screening questions for their own children before sending to school. Note that only a minority of children who have COVID-19 will have a fever. Furthermore, taking the temperature of students may create a bottleneck that will cause the type of crowding and contact with other students that should be avoided.

When Someone Is Sick

We have a culture of working or going to school when sick and we need to change that culture and encourage staff and students to stay home when sick. This message should be clearly sent to staff, parents and students. Perfect attendance awards for staff and students should be eliminated. We must strive to keep sick people at home.

Schools Must: (when someone is identified with symptoms):

- Remove the individual immediately. If it's a staff member, send that person home immediately. If it is a student, isolate the student until arrangements can be made for the child to be picked up by a parent or guardian.

- Advise the individual to contact a healthcare provider if they exhibit symptoms or answered YES to any screening question. The healthcare provider will be able to determine whether the symptoms are a result of COVID-19 infection or if there are other health issues.
- Contact your local health agency. They will assist with determining when it is acceptable for the person to return to work or school. Currently, the minimum is 10 days when a person is COVID-positive.
- Follow the guidance of the local health department regarding contact tracing, classroom or school closure, notification of community, sanitizing protocols, etc.

Social Distancing

Social distancing of a minimum of 6' is the best preventative measure. While children are the least likely to exhibit serious symptoms from COVID-19, social distancing helps prevent the spread to adults—especially those who may be at high risk. Note that all individuals within less than 6' of an individual tested positive for COVID-19 for longer than 15 minutes, will be asked to quarantine. Keep this in mind when deciding parameters in regards to social distancing.

Schools Must:

- Establish social distancing protocols for various activities during the school day—classroom, cafeteria, gym, playground, etc.
- Establish a process for social distancing, not mixing different student groups and sanitization between groups when students are eating within a cafeteria. If this can't be accomplished in the cafeteria, schools must consider eating within a classroom.
- Establish a contained area (such as a vestibule) for parent when checking students in/out during the school day. If others are waiting to check their student in, they should wait outside (in their vehicle if necessary) so there is a limited number of individuals in the contained area.
- Discontinue allowing nonessential visitors into the school. Individuals should not be allowed to visit classrooms and should remain in a contained area if visiting the school is necessary. Only one person should be in the contained area at one time. If others are waiting they should wait outside (in their vehicle if necessary) so there is a limited number of individuals in the contained area.
- Administer a temperature check and health screening questions if a vendor (food suppliers to the food preparation areas, for example) is allowed into the school building. Face masks should be required for these individuals.
- Keep accurate records of anyone who has been inside a building in case an outbreak occurs to assist with contact tracing efforts.

Schools May:

- Address class size by splitting classes, requiring attendance on alternating days and/or reducing the number of students within the classroom.

- Adjust elective classes by offering activities within the classroom instead of students moving to a new space.
- Establish a schedule for varying arrival and departure times to minimize the number of students entering and exiting the building at the same time.

Transportation

Schools Must:

- Assign seats to reduce transmission and assist with contact tracing if necessary.
- Establish a protocol for loading and unloading of buses to minimize student contact such as loading the rear of the bus first.
- Establish cleaning protocols for sanitizing each bus in between routes.
- Require older students (over the age of 9) to wear face masks while being transported on the bus if they are sitting in close proximity to other students.
- Require bus drivers to wear face masks.

Schools May:

- Reduce the number of students on a bus by allowing only one student per seat and/or alternating rows of students.
- Encourage parents to transport students to and from school.

Face Masks (or Face Shields)-Staff

Schools Must:

- Require staff members to wear a face mask or face shield when within 6' of another individual.
- Require other adults, such as repairmen, who are in the building to wear a face mask at all times.
- Instruct staff in the proper manner in which a face mask should be worn. Efforts should be made to destigmatize the wearing of face masks to protect those students who need to wear one.

Schools May:

- Provide face shields for health care workers, as an additional precaution.

Face Masks-Students

Schools Must:

- Require older students (over the age of 9) to wear a face mask if there are circumstances that put them in close areas. If at all possible, wearing masks when in a hallway during passing period is highly recommended. Younger students who are less able to comply with a requirement to wear a face mask should not be asked to do so.
- Require students who are in a high risk group to wear a face mask at all times.

- Isolate any student who becomes ill and provide a face mask.
- Instruct students who are being required to wear a face mask in the proper manner in which a mask should be worn. Efforts should be made to destigmatize the wearing of face masks to protect those students who need to wear one.

Schools May:

- Require older students (over the age of 9) to wear face masks at all times.
 - It should be noted that improper use of a cloth face mask or frequent hand to face activity which might be stimulated by continuous face mask usage could result in increased risk of infection.
- Require all student to wear face masks at all times.

Gloves-Staff (gloves not necessary for students)

Schools Must:

- Provide gloves for any staff member working with sick or suspected sick individuals. A fresh pair of gloves should be worn when working with each new individual. An individual should use hand sanitizer before putting on gloves and then once again after removing gloves.
- Require custodians to use gloves whenever cleaning.

Hand Washing-Staff and Students

Schools Must:

- Require hand washing upon entering the building, before eating, after eating, after restroom usage, before any group activities and before boarding buses.

Schools May:

- Recommend hand washing any time the face/mouth are touched (which may prove difficult with younger students).
- Provide hand sanitizer in classrooms and throughout the building.

Water Fountains-Staff and Students(note: the CDC has not issued specific guidance around water fountains)

Schools Must:

- Avoid groups congregating around water fountains waiting for access.

Schools May:

- Close down access to water fountains.
- Allow use of water fountains for filling water bottles.

Staff Restrooms

Schools Must:

- Administer at least one deep cleaning a day and clean/wipe down high touch surfaces throughout the day. High touch surfaces can transmit the disease but it's not a high instance.
- Maintain a cleaning log to assist with contact tracing if necessary.

Student Restrooms/Usage

Schools Must:

- Limit the number of students in the restroom.
- Administer at least one deep cleaning a day and clean/wipe down high touch surfaces throughout the day. High touch surfaces can transmit the disease but it's not a high instance.
- Maintain a cleaning log so if there is an outbreak in a classroom, it will help with contact tracing to know when the bathrooms were cleaned during scheduled class bathroom breaks.

Schools May:

- Implement scheduled restroom breaks so each grade/class can use at a specific time and avoid mixing students from different classes.
- Mark spaces outside restrooms to provide visual cues to ensure social distancing while waiting.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided guidelines regarding cleaning and disinfecting school buildings and other areas.

Schools Must:

- Require the use of disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting.
- Clean surfaces using soap and water, then use disinfectant.
- Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.
 - More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use.
 - High touch surfaces and objects (such as tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.) in public places should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Disinfect using EPA-registered household disinfectant, properly diluted bleach solutions or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol.

Schools May:

- Implement sanitizing procedures using alternative means. Please check the effectiveness with local health department.

Social and Emotional Well-being

This pandemic has caused stress on staff and students. From prolonged absences to fear of the unknown to deaths related to COVID-19, there have been a variety of stressors on our school community. Schools should consider these objectives when creating their re-entry plans.

- Consider adopting an approach of universal services for mental health support for all students and staff.
- Provide training to teachers and other staff on how to talk to and support students during a pandemic and psychological first aid.
- Consider contacting students who do not return to school with a wellness check-in as they may be experiencing school avoidance due to anxiety related to the pandemic.
- Provide additional support to students who may be exhibiting suicidal ideation or grieving due to loss of a family or friend, or missed experiences.
- Consider what academic accommodations will be implemented for students having difficulty concentrating or learning new information due to stress associated with the pandemic.

When a Case is Identified

If an individual within a school building is tested positive for COVID-19, schools must work with their local health department but could expect some of these parameters to be put in place:

- Identify who the individual was in contact with, within a 6-foot space, for at least 15 minutes. If specific contacts cannot be identified, quarantine everyone who was in the same room, bus or other areas. Schools will need to keep room/bus logs or photos in order to do this contact tracing. By having a seating chart, bus seating charts or photos, the number of students needing to quarantine can be minimized.
- The St. Louis County Health Department suggests that if over 5% of the student body in a building or district test positive any day, 4% test positive over 2 days in a row or 3% test positive for 3 days in a row, then that building or district closes for 10 days. (Percentages may change in the coming weeks or months when better scientific data becomes available.)
- Schools need to ensure there is a space to isolate a sick student or staff member until the individual can leave the building.
- In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the staff or students, a school may close for 1-2 days for cleaning and disinfection of that building or exposed area if unable to clean during the nighttime closing.