Designing a Flexible Reopening Plan With a Focus on Safety

Framing the Issue

Since the beginning of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the unexpected closing of American schools in the spring of 2020, school administrators, educators, and communities have wondered what the fall school reopening would look like across the country.

Leaders are challenged to balance the benefit of educating students in schools with the potential health risks that could result, as described in guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This balance of flexibility with safety for all educators and students while doing everything possible to give all students equal access to quality education is our focus in this brief.

Key Takeaways

The key takeaways for successfully designing flexible school reopening plans are to:

- **prepare school transportation and facilities** to provide a clean and safe environment;

- **create new standard operating procedures** to minimize virus transmission;

- **educate students, parents, and staff** on new procedures and personal protective measures;

- **implement in-school instructional methods** utilizing social distancing;

- ensure students, whether **attending classes virtually or in person**, receive appropriate services or accommodations; and

- **engage with community partners** for feedback and support.

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Exemplars

Plans from Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri include numerous guiding questions and considerations for opening schools, alternative learning experiences, and the health and safety of all stakeholders associated with school districts. These plans strongly encourage community partnerships, as well as flexibility, when planning synchronous and asynchronous instruction for students. Note that all states have developed plans; we include these three states as examples and recommend that you check your state education agency's website for more information.

- **Kentucky: COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools Initial Guidance for Schools and Districts** (https://education. ky.gov/comm/Documents/Reopening%20Guidance%20%20 051520kf_tkt%20421pm%20TM.pdf). The purpose of this guidance is to serve as a starting point for schools and districts as they plan to collaborate with their communities and health officials to reopen in the fall. This guidance is expected to evolve as new information becomes available.

- **Maryland: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education** (http://marylandpublicschools.org/newsroom/Documents/ MSDERecoveryPlan.pdf). The purpose of this document is to present a variety of strategies and considerations for schools and districts as they plan to collaborate with their communities and health officials to reopen in the fall.

- **Missouri: Pandemic Recovery Considerations: Re-Entry and Reopening of Schools** (https://ams.embr.mobi/Documents/ DocumentAttachment.aspx?C=ZfON&DID=GJGDM). This document is intended to provide considerations, consistent with information that has been released by the state and federal agencies, for schools and districts to use as they plan to collaborate with their communities and health officials to reopen in the fall.

Resources

- CDC has provided information (https://www.cdc.gov/ coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/reopening-schools.html) about the importance of reopening America's schools this fall. This document discusses the critical functions of the in-person school environment and current studies regarding COVID-19 and children.

- CDC has provided a resource page (https://www.cdc.gov/ coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index. html) for school and child care programs. These resources include printable posters and graphics, communication materials, cleaning and disinfecting guidelines, checklists for families, and science and principles for returning to and operating schools.

- CDC created an interactive decision-making tool (https://www.cdc. gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/decision-tool.html) to assist school and district administrators in making (re) opening decisions regarding K–12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This tool is also designed to help parents, caregivers, and guardians weigh the risks and benefits of available educational options to help them make decisions about sending their children back to school.

- CDC has provided a document (https://www.cdc.gov/ coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf) that briefly summarizes CDC's initiatives, activities, and tools in support of the Whole-of-Government response to COVID-19 in May 2020.

https://www.air.org/resource/air-s-covid-19-response-and-resources

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