ASBSD's Reopening of Schools Guide for School Boards
June, 2020

Our gratitude and credit is given to the Illinois School Board Association, and the Missouri School Board Association for their work on their reopening guidance.

This guidance document is intended to provide a framework to guide local school boards in discussions about the reopening of school in the fall. It is intended to serve as a supplemental document to the South Dakota Department of Education guide: *Starting Well 2020*.

School boards should always keep the best interest of the social, mental, academic and safety needs of the students and staff in mind when making important decisions about reopening.

Local boards of education are encouraged to use this guide to think about decisions they will need to make as they approach the reopening of their school buildings.

It is not intended to be a specific "how to" for every scenario since each school district is unique, but rather a checklist for your team to use in your deliberations.

We encourage local boards and administrators to establish a Reopening Planning Team, if they have not done so already. ASBSD's Reopening of Schools Guide and the Start Well guide could be used as a checklist of considerations for your planning meetings.

The board of education plays a critical role in the development and oversight of plans involving the reopening and closing of schools during and following the pandemic. The board's role in establishing policy and approving funding for their local districts is vital.

An important part of an initial conversation within the leadership team involves determination of who will make decisions regarding the "Key Considerations" (i.e. the board, a board committee or the superintendent), how plans will be implemented, how decisions and plans will be reported and how progress toward initiatives will be monitored and communicated.

The questions and points of consideration within this document are intended to guide school boards and administrators in the development of their reopening plan.

What key board policies should be reviewed when planning for reopening?

- ✓ Develop a specific protocol for how and when the school district and attendance centers will open as scheduled, whether a modified opening will occur, and/or if or when the district's Remote Learning Plan will be implemented. (*see Start Well decision tree for reopening*)
- ✓ Review the 2020-21 school calendar to determine whether contingencies or revisions are required.
- ✓ Consider contingency plans for remote learning should individual schools or the entire district need to close again because of an outbreak of COVID-19 and develop a specific remote learning plan that will be implemented should an outbreak force school closures.
- ✓ Review the district's technology plan to ensure the district is taking appropriate steps to expand the number of students with reliable internet access and access to necessary devices.
- ✓ Review the relevant district employee policies for clarity and to minimize absenteeism while encouraging employees to remain home if they are ill.
- ✓ Review student attendance policies to ensure flexibility and consider the appropriateness of removing punitive measures for absences when there is an outbreak of a contagious disease.
- ✓ Review facility use policies, including use for non-educational purposes and cancellation policies. Consider temporarily suspending facility use for non-education purposes.
- ✓ Review guidance and directives from state and local health agencies to identify triggers for school building openings, closures and to inform modification of practices, such as allowing visitors and/or public access to buildings.
- ✓ Review requirements of the Open Meetings laws if virtual meetings are necessary.
- ✓ Consider a plan to keep constituents, stakeholders and the media aware of the district's planning efforts.

What should boards consider regarding Personnel and Human Resource issues?

- ✓ Identify all items that may require consultation with the affected employee groups and their representatives.
- ✓ Review policies on use of benefit leave, leave of absence, sick leave and other benefits in collective bargaining agreements with a focus on COVID-19 considerations.
- ✓ Review policies for payments for course overloads, additional supervision and changes to the current negotiated agreement in light of COVID-19 considerations.
- ✓ Establish clear policies of expectations of employee work during remote learning.
- ✓ Transition of students and staff from in-person to remote learning (and back to in-person).
- ✓ Review changes to job descriptions and responsibilities necessitated by shift to remote learning and face to face teaching.
- ✓ Review extracurricular stipends impacted by extended school closings.
- ✓ Consult legal counsel before modifying existing collective bargaining agreements or executing any Memorandum of Understanding with an affected bargaining unit.
- ✓ Prepare for increased demand for substitute teachers and support staff.
- ✓ Identify potential additional costs associated with increased demand for personnel related to school closures, modified schedules, remote learning, etc.
- ✓ Assess current staff and projected need for additional staffing such as nurses, aides, etc.
- ✓ Review benefits and options for health services for staff such as telehealth, employee assistance programs (EAP), etc.
- ✓ Contact all staff to verify contact and emergency contact information.
- ✓ Verify the health and safety of the employee and their family.
- ✓ Inform staff of available benefits of mental health resources such as Employee Assistance Programs.
- ✓ Review safety procedures for employees and provide appropriate gear for those with repeated interaction with the public (plexiglass barriers, gloves, etc.).
- ✓ Provide a timely and relevant professional development program to all staff.

What fiscal issues should boards consider?

- ✓ Determine how state and federal COVID-19 funding and other grants will impact your local budget.
- ✓ Review the process for equipment inventory that includes a process for distributing and collecting district assets and for ensuring the collection of assets from students and staff who do not return.
- ✓ Review the procurement procedures for PPE and related equipment and supplies necessary to protect the health and welfare of students, staff, and the public and consult with legal counsel before suspending any procurement policies.
- ✓ Review the procurement procedures for hardware, software, licenses, learning management systems, etc. that are necessary to implement remote learning.
- ✓ Review and revise the district's technology plan.
- ✓ Determine whether an assessment or survey is necessary to determine students' home access to reliable internet and necessary devices.
- ✓ Review and restructure where possible relevant vendor contracts and contracts for services that may be impacted by school closings, modified schedules, restricted access to facilities, changes in working conditions, etc.
- ✓ Contact legal counsel prior to executing revised agreements.
- ✓ Require proof of emergency plan from crucial vendors to prevent or minimize disruption in services to students.
- ✓ Ensure contracts require proper hygiene protocols for service providers or products entering the building.
- ✓ **Warning:** There will be vendors using the current crisis to increase sales and any new purchases need to be vetted independently and thoroughly.
- ✓ Document COVID-19 related expenses and keep current on rules for the expenditure of federal funds.
- ✓ Determine the impact of pandemic and related disruptions to in-person learning and school closures on construction projects.

What should boards consider regarding communication with staff and the community?

- ✓ Effective and ongoing communication is a critical component before, during, and after any school crisis and implementing specific communication procedures and protocols will allow staff, students, families, and the community to safely re-engage in the education process.
- ✓ Work with the state and local public health department to gain a clear understanding of the notification process for reporting suspected and confirmed cases.
- ✓ Create a method for parents, students and employees to contact the district outside regular business hours when they have symptoms of or have been exposed to COVID-19.
- ✓ Prepare sample communications to parents/guardians related to the following:
  - o Information on the health and safety measures the district is taking to ensure students can return to school buildings safely.
  - o The district will work closely with state and local health departments to develop appropriate safety protocols for students and others entering school facilities.
  - o The expectations of parents and students if the district moves to Remote Learning or modified school openings (i.e. staggered start, changes in bus routing, etc.)
  - o Basic information on COVID-19 and measures families can take to stay safe when not at school.
  - o Communicate availability of community resources for families (i.e. mental health resources, food security, etc.).
- ✓ Prepare communications to and for students. *Example: Hang posters in all buildings and provide other messaging on hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.*
- ✓ Provide students information on mental health resources and suicide prevention hotline(s).
- ✓ Prepare communications to the public. *Example: Post reminders at entryways not to enter the school if experiencing signs of illness.*
- ✓ Provide information on changes to policies regarding visitors to schools and public access to facilities on the district's web page and in other communications.

What should boards consider with school district facilities?

- ✓ Ensure that all buildings have been inspected to determine readiness for re-entry and obtain other legal and appropriate safety inspections. *Example: Fire code/safety inspections of all occupied buildings.*
- ✓ Health department inspections of all cafeterias.
- ✓ HVAC/air quality inspections.
- ✓ Water quality inspections for drinking fountains and bathrooms that have not been used recently.
- ✓ Know your district's plans for disinfection and prevention, which may include contracting with a cleaning service to treat facilities if there is a case of COVID-19 on campus.
- ✓ Ensure initial and ongoing cleaning and disinfecting of all buildings, desks, equipment, and other "high touch" sur-faces prior to and after students return, using CDC and OSHA guidelines.
- ✓ Increase frequency during the traditional flu season and if there are increased incidents of COVID-19 exposure in the area or in the school community.
- ✓ Thoroughly ventilate, clean and disinfect all buses and other district vehicles.
- ✓ Inventory buildings to improve prevention measures. *Example: Ensure there are enough accessible sinks and hand-sanitizing stations to accommodate frequent handwashing.*
- ✓ Evaluate how hygiene products like soap, paper towels, tissues and toilet paper are dispensed (no-touch) and how frequently they are replenished.
- ✓ Inventory and request necessary supplies for the health room and other building use. *Example: PPE (gloves, masks, gowns), Touch-free thermometers, Sanitizers/cleanser, hand soap, tissues.*
- ✓ Review areas used to house ill students and those requiring specialized nursing services (additional spaces may be required). *Example: Provide a separate room for pickup of those who may have COVID-19 or other disease and ensure restricted access and frequent disinfecting.*
- ✓ Determine if an area separate from the nurse's office is necessary to care for students that need suctioning, tube feeding, nebulizers, etc. to minimize contact with potentially ill children.
- ✓ Ensure furniture and other surfaces can be easily disinfected.
- ✓ Ensure trash cans and other receptacles are no-touch.
- ✓ Ensure the use of non-contact thermometers or that a plan is in place to increase sterilization to minimize the risk of reinfection resulting from reuse of equipment.
- ✓ Determine the feasibility of telehealth options for district, staff, and family use, if necessary.
- ✓ Communicate changes in procedures with families and staff as they are made.
- ✓ Contact all parents of students with medical plans in cases where changes may be needed to address practices aimed at minimizing the risk of infection to the child.
- ✓ Revise medication schedules to minimize the number of students in the nurse's office.
- ✓ Prepare lists of medical/dental resources to share with families.
- ✓ Prepare to provide daily health reports to the central office and periodic summary reports to the board of education.
- ✓ Verify where staff and students can be tested for COVID-19.
- ✓ Notify the health department when student or staff absences drop below predetermined threshold.

What policies should the board consider regarding academic programs?

- ✓ Verify that school reopening plans include a diagnostic assessment component for all students returning to school to determine learning loss, to inform modifications to curriculum standards and expectations, to identify support services that may be required, etc.
- ✓ Verify that plans include established procedures for educator teams to meet and address student learning needs for both in-person and remote instruction.
- ✓ Review building schedules to ensure (if appropriate): Additional time for student academic intervention and enrichment.
- ✓ Additional time for handwashing, sanitizing desks, and other good hygiene practices.
- ✓ Consider additional time for passing/transition periods and rest room usage.
- ✓ Review plans for special education services: Verify that plans address educational and health services if a) a doctor determines it is not safe for the student to attend school, b) the district's Remote Learning Plan is implemented, or c) modifications are made to school opening (i.e. staggered starts, etc.).
- ✓ Enrollment of students: Review open enrollment policies when considering transferring students and ensure a screening process for enrolling transfer students is implemented after consultation with state and/or local health departments.
- ✓ Determine if a student is transferring from a hot spot or has recently visited a hot spot and has been exposed to the virus and determine when students need to self-quarantine prior to beginning school.
- ✓ Review and prioritize school supply lists before they are publicized to reflect consideration of the economic circumstances of the community.
- ✓ Review the district's Acceptable Use policies related to the use of devices and infrastructure by students and staff (whether on site or remotely).
- ✓ Review plans for teaching healthy habits to students and staff that are consistent with guidance from state and local health departments.

What should boards consider regarding the social and emotional well-being of students and staff?

- ✓ Establish and train a crisis management team or activate crisis management teams to address psychological and emotional concerns in conjunction with the local mental health services, including post-traumatic stress syndrome counseling.
- ✓ Select locations appropriate to confidentially administer psychological and emotional aid and discuss with school counselors.
- ✓ Prepare and revise lists of professional mental health services, particularly those willing to provide services via telehealth.
- ✓ Develop a process for screening students for mental health or trauma and ensure that appropriate district staff are trained to implement the process.
- ✓ Review what actions to take when a student screens positive for a mental health crisis.
- ✓ Review the district's suicide awareness and prevention policy and ensure an appropriate number of staff have been trained to respond to an incident and screen high-risk students.
- ✓ Plan re-engagement activities to get parents and students comfortable with a return to the school building.
- ✓ Provide families multiple opportunities to apply for the free and reduced-lunch program.
- ✓ If there has been a loss of a student, staff member or a member of the school community, plan appropriate messaging to the school community and include the availability of appropriate resources to support students and staff.

Other Resources

South Dakota Department of Education:

Starting Well 2020: **doe.sd.gov/coronavirus/startingwell.aspx**

Coronavirus resources: **https://doe.sd.gov/coronavirus/**

South Dakota High School Activities Association:

Summer Contact Recommendations:
https://www.sdhsaa.com/Portals/0/PDFs/SummerContactRecommendations.pdf

Center for Disease Control:

School Reopening Decision Tools: **https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools-decision-tool.html**

Considerations for Schools: **https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html**