

“Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, acting, living! It is possible to live differently in this world.” Pope Francis

RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

**Strategies and Action Plans for Education
2020-2021**



Office of Education,
Evangelization and Catechesis

ARCHDIOCESE
of HARTFORD

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INTRODUCTION

"Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself ... But that takes audacity and courage." Pope Francis

The world as we know it changed significantly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring the closure of all Connecticut schools after Friday, March 13, and creating the need for a sudden shift to remote learning. The Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Hartford responded quickly and efficiently to this new reality, greeting their students virtually on Monday, March 16 and moving confidently forward with continuous instruction.

Throughout the last several months of the 2020 school year, our students experienced no loss of learning as their teachers adapted to the new format and embraced teaching remotely. Staff of the Archdiocesan education office met weekly with all school administrators to share support and best practices in remote learning, and created an online information hub, providing educators with extensive resources. Schools ensured that all students had access to Chromebooks, iPads, or tablets and maintained regular interaction with parents regarding student progress. The integrity of the academic program was sustained and student assessment remained grade-based.

Catholic schools in the Archdiocese are also well positioned to address the social / emotional wellbeing of students, and this was carefully cultivated through personal interaction with teachers and classmates, and through daily participation in faith formation. Online Masses, prayer services, and sharing of intentions enriched this difficult period for every school. Paramount to all else, our schools remain committed to building community whether remotely or in-person. Building community reinforces we are one family united in Christ. Our schools nurture a culture of inclusiveness and justice, mindful that students may return to school in need of healing in mind and heart.

Our schools have met and overcome the challenges presented by this pandemic. There is no way to know with any certainty what the next school year will bring, however the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Hartford stand ready to fully address and meet the educational needs of their students, both in person and remotely, while ensuring that health and safety remain the priority. Each school has prepared a plan for returning to in-person instruction and shared it with their communities well in advance of the start of the school year.

The following strategies and guidelines outline common standards and expectations that all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Hartford have included in their respective school plans to ensure a safe, healthy, and academically rigorous school year regardless of the platform or environment in which the students will learn. Each school's plan is tailored specifically for their building and school community.

Our priority remains the same - to teach to the whole child: mind, body and spirit. We are proud of the outstanding performance of our schools and their students during this period of great challenge. While we don't always know what the future will bring, we are confident that our students will meet any task they encounter with perseverance, knowledge, and success, poised to meet the future with boundless hope.



RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION STRATEGY

OVERVIEW FOR SCHOOL PLANNING

Each school must submit a Return to In-person Instruction Strategy (RIIS) that is tailored to the unique needs of their school, the resources available to optimize teaching and learning, and predicated upon the health and safety of the entire school community. Each plan should be designed in consultation with their local health agencies, a Return to In-Person Instruction Team (RIIT), and in compliance with Archdiocesan guidelines. Additionally, each plan must incorporate flexibility to adapt to changing health conditions.

The template included in this document (Appendix A) is to be used to submit your school's RIIS. This template accounts for a phased approach that considers three scenarios for the school year 2020-2021, with the understanding that conditions may arise that require the movement from one phase to another. *At all times when students or faculty are gathered in person, it is understood that close adherence to state health and safety guidelines and social distancing will be maintained.*

Recommendations for Three Possible Phases

Green Phase: Schools conduct all in-person instruction with strict adherence to social distancing and health and safety guidelines. Options must be in place for parents who elect to keep their child at home due to personal health circumstances. These guidelines include but are not limited to:

- All desks are facing the same direction, 3+ feet apart.
- Desks are spaced out as physically distant as possible.
- Consider organizing students into smaller cohorts.
- Students will wear masks in classrooms when 6 feet of distancing cannot be physically maintained.
- Masks will be worn in all common areas of school.
- Hand sanitizing dispensers are available in each classroom and office space.
- Students are encouraged and allowed to wash hands as often as possible.
- Classroom surfaces are cleaned with disinfecting wipes at least twice a day.
- Restrooms are cleaned at least three times a day.
- Commonly touched surfaces are cleaned every day.
- Lunches can be organized in classrooms or in cafeterias where space allows for socializing with 6-foot distancing.
- Send communication updates to families at least once a week.
- Hand sanitizers/stations at entrances, classrooms and offices



- People 5 and over must wear masks while in the school and when not able to maintain 6 feet distancing.
- Schedule mask breaks
- One way hallways and stairwells
- 6 feet distancing wherever and whenever feasible

The Yellow Phase: Schools provide a hybrid blended model of in-person instruction and remote learning instruction. Any in-school instruction must follow the health and safety guidelines outlined in Green Phase. This Yellow Phase strategy may be tailored to each school based on available resources, classroom size, enrollment and physical school space structures. The following list suggests options for a yellow phase:

- Based on virus data, CSDE may require reducing the number of students in the school building at one time.
- This phase may take effect if a cohort of students has to quarantine.
- Consider keeping Kindergarten full time.
- Stagger starting time and ending time to limit the number of students entering and exiting the school building at the same time.
- Alternate days when half the class comes to school to receive in-person instruction while half the class live-streams the school day from home.
- Alternate days when whole grades to come to school and receive in-person instruction; whole grades remain at home to receive *remote learning instruction*, as outlined in the red phase (below).
- Utilize A/B Scheduling or separating students alphabetically.
- AM/PM Schedule
- Middle School: Students remain in the classroom and teachers move from class to class, limiting how many students are in the hallway at one time.

The Red Phase: School is closed for in-person instruction. All instruction must be provided via remote learning using digital and non-digital platforms, depending on the grade level. Grades 4-12 must incorporate live virtual classroom instruction and connections at least twice a week, optimally four days a week. Grades PreK-3 may rely on digital and non-digital platforms with a live virtual classroom session at least four times a week. Clear procedures and protocols must be in place for communication, unit planning, instruction, assessment, and technology platforms.

- Increase frequency of communication to families using multiple platforms.
- Synchronous instruction will occur at least 4 days a week aligned to the curriculum and supplemented with asynchronous instruction.
- Consider looping for younger grades.
- Pre-K can remain in session.
- Synchronous and asynchronous differentiated small group instruction; 1:1 as needed
- Elementary/Middle Specials: live sessions will occur.



- Teachers can teach remotely from home or school.
- Transition to instructional and assessment methods with same objectives.

Considerations for School Plans

Each school plan must consider:

- Who will be on your Return to In-Person Instruction Team (RIIT)?
- How will you bring students and staff back to the physical school building safely, maintaining health guidelines?
- How will you communicate your plan to your school community and stake holders and maintain ongoing communication?
- How will remote learning look at each grade level?
- What professional development will you coordinate to ensure teachers are well-prepared for remote learning at their grade level?

Considerations for Cleaning and Sanitizing:

- How will you ensure the building is cleaned and ready to safely welcome staff and students?
- How often will you implement cleaning, disinfecting, and ventilation protocols to maintain student and staff safety?
- What protocols will be put in place throughout the day to maintain health and safety?
- What training will you coordinate to ensure custodians properly clean and disinfect school building?
- How will classrooms/learning spaces be organized to mitigate spread?
- How will you group students with staff to limit the number of individuals who come into contact with each other throughout the school day?
- What policies and procedures will govern use of other communal spaces within the school building?
- How will you utilize outdoor space to help meet social distancing needs?
- What visitor and volunteer policies will you implement to mitigate spread?
- Will any of these social distancing and other safety protocols differ based on age and/or grade ranges?

Considerations for Monitoring Student and Staff Health:

- What is the policy for quarantine or isolation if a staff, student, or other member of the school community becomes ill or has been exposed to an individual confirmed positive for COVID-19?
- Which staff will be responsible for making decisions regarding quarantine or isolation requirements of staff or students?



- What conditions will a staff or student confirmed to have COVID-19 need to meet to safely return to school? How will you accommodate staff who are unable or uncomfortable to return?
- How will you determine which students are willing/able to return? How will you accommodate students who are unable or uncomfortable to return?
- What is the local policy/procedure regarding face coverings for staff? What is the policy/procedure for students?
- What special protocols will you implement to protect students and staff at higher risk for severe illness?
- How will you ensure enough substitute teachers are prepared in the event of staff illness?
- How will you strategically deploy instructional and non-instructional staff to ensure all students have access to quality learning opportunities, as well as supports for social emotional wellness at school and at home?

Key Strategies and Action Steps Under Each Phase

Once the type of instruction appropriate for the conditions in your local community is recommended, coordinate with your RIIT to complete the following action plan template to create a thorough plan for your school at each phase. The template provided (Appendix A) is an outline for your action plan at each phase. This can be submitted or a template of your choice can be used that includes all the listed components. Once completed and approved, this RIIS becomes a positive communication tool to share with your families so there is a clear understanding of how you will provide quality instruction and a safe and healthy environment for your entire school community.

Create a Taskforce and Action Plan

Each school should create a task force committee to help lead the development of Return to In-Person Instruction Strategies (RIIS). No one single person should be required to develop and implement a school plan. A school taskforce includes stakeholders from across the school community including health professionals, administrators, educators, parents, School Board members, or members of the local community.

Names of Return to In-Person Instruction Team (RIIT):

Individual Name	Stakeholder Group Represented	Roles and Responsibilities

Each school plan is informed by the guidelines created by the Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis (OEEC) and reflects best practices disseminated by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Public



Health (DPH), and the CT State Department of Education (CSDE). The ultimate goal is to develop, after reviewing the recommendations of all the research, a comprehensive school plan that will minimize the influence of COVID-19 on the educational experience and programs of our students, their families, and our faculty and staff.

The work of the taskforce is to develop a specific school action plan that includes strategies for three possible learning environments this coming school year. The action plan will include strategies for the following phases:

- **GREEN Phase:** *low risk* – allows for a full in-person learning environment with specific health and safety measures in place.
- **YELLOW Phase:** *moderate risk* – allows for a hybrid or blended learning environment, part in-person and part-remote, which accommodates a need for reduced building capacity. All safety measures during GREEN phase apply.
- **RED Phase:** *high risk* – provides for full remote learning.

The taskforce will monitor transitions from in-person to remote learning and back to the classrooms, determine necessary health and safety protocols, and proactively prepare to respond to issues as they arise. Decisions made to transition from one phase to another will be driven by data received from the CDC and the CT DPH and informed by results of scientific based research.

DEFINITIONS

1.) Remote Learning - Remote learning provides an opportunity for students and teachers to remain connected and engaged with the content while working from their homes or a location off school campus. It involves both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Remote learning is something a school should be able to switch off and on based on need.

It is different from distance learning that typically has gone through an official process of establishing a school, adopting an online curriculum, and creating a dedicated structure to support students enrolled in a distance learning program.

“Transitioning to remote learning can keep students on track so that when they return to physical school environments, they will not need to complete a lot of make-up work to be ready for any scheduled assessments. Many of the requirements in a traditional classroom environment will be in play for remote learning environments, and the goal is to adhere to as many state and local requirements as possible” (Kay, 2020).

It is important to note that in remote learning environments, versus distance learning environments, the learner and teacher are not typically accustomed to having distance during instruction. Remote learning is designed to be able to transition back to in-person instruction at any time.



2.) Remote Synchronous Instruction – Two-way, real-time/live, online instruction between teachers and students when students are not on campus. In this method, the required amount of instructional time is scheduled each day. Synchronous instruction is provided through a computer or other electronic device or over the phone. The teacher may also schedule live, synchronous one-on-one or small group sessions. All instructional methods must address the required curriculum for each specific content area.

Examples of Synchronous activities may include:

- Scheduled live class time with the whole group
- Scheduled one-on-one or small group sessions
- Scheduled quizzes and tests
- Scheduled collaborative discussion time for students to share ideas
- Live streamed lectures or demonstrations of skills and assignments

3.) Remote Asynchronous Instruction – Instruction that does not require having the teacher and students engaged at the same time. In this method, students learn from instruction that is not necessarily being delivered in-person or in real time. This type of instruction may include various forms of digital and online learning, such as prerecorded video lessons or online posted learning tasks that students complete on their own. Pre-assigned work and formative assessments are integral parts of an asynchronous assignment. Instructional methods must address the required curriculum for each specific content area.

Examples of asynchronous activities may include:

- **Videos:** Turn in-class lectures into videos by recording your teaching. For best results, you can combine video with documents, text, photos, and slides for a full presentation.
- **Demonstrations:** Sometimes students need to see something in action. Post an existing video that shows a skill, or make your own and publish it on YouTube. Consider using the transcript tool to make a text copy for student reference.
- **Group Projects:** Your students don't have to be in the same room to work together. Group presentations and reports can be edited using Google Docs or Dropbox for real-time collaboration and commenting.
- **Learning Activities:** Your students need to apply what they've picked up in your online materials, so try creating quizzes and games that let them practice their skills and get feedback on what they know--and what needs work.



COMMON STANDARDS FOR REMOTE LEARNING

- Every class will adopt both synchronous and asynchronous instructional methods.
- Each school may adopt the online learning platform that best suits the training of its teachers and needs of the students such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Apple Classroom, or SeeSaw.
- For scheduled synchronous learning, individual classes may select from technologies such as Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or the like that provide online whole class learning environments.
- Opportunities for synchronous learning must take place *at least 4 times a week* in any grade that has to transition to remote learning.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS FOR REMOTE LEARNING

This coming school year presents the possibility of having to transition to a remote learning environment, distinctly different from a distance learning environment. In a remote learning setting, our goal is to mirror a typical in-person day to the extent possible. The following expectations provide guidelines for students and teachers: *Each course/subject will have a live, synchronous component. Class routines and schedules should be determined and adhered to throughout the remote learning period.*

- Classes will begin on time.
- Assignments are expected to be completed in the allotted amount of time, as is the expectation in school, adhering to appropriate deadlines for remote learning environments.
- All classes will be recorded.
- Students should give their best effort, exhibit appropriate online class conduct, and attend classes regularly, health permitting.
- Students should attend online classes in school uniform or appropriate clothes for school. Schools will establish dress codes for attending online classes. (While shoes are optional, pajamas are not considered appropriate school clothes.)
- Students should sign on from their remote location in a room that is distraction-free and conducive for studying and learning, preferably not a bedroom.
- Students should have their cell phones in a different room during class time.
- Stay in contact! Teachers will stay in touch with students and students should stay in contact with their teacher(s).



SCHEDULES

The following schedule of remote learning classes is recommended at each grade level:

Pre-Kindergarten

- Pre-kindergarten programs may continue to operate in schools during the green, red or yellow phase. The only exception to this is if the governor closes down all day care centers in the state due to significant increase in virus data.
- Teachers and aides are expected to wear masks. Children should be taught how to wear a mask, however, are not required to wear masks while indoors.
- Teachers must make every effort to promote social distancing to the extent possible at this age level.

Kindergarten Through Grade 3

- *Kindergarten is encouraged to remain open during the yellow phase.* If schools are required to minimize building capacity, kindergarten should remain in person at least four days a week.
- Kindergarten must transition to remote learning in a red phase.
- Synchronous live, whole group instruction will occur at least 4 days a week for K-3 and will schedule time for religion, all the English language arts, math, and alternate science and social studies. Interdisciplinary instruction should be planned to the extent possible.
- Small group and differentiated instruction for individual students should be scheduled as part of synchronous learning times as often as necessary.
- Live session for specials will occur as directed by the school leader.

Grades 4 and 5

- Synchronous live whole group instruction will occur at least 4 days a week and will schedule time for religion, all the English language arts, math, and alternate science and social studies. Interdisciplinary instruction should be intentionally planned in each designed unit to the extent possible.
- Small group and differentiated instruction for individual students should be scheduled as part of synchronous learning times at least twice a week.
- Asynchronous learning will take place to schedule time for independent project work or completion of assignments.
- Live session for specials will occur as directed by the school leader.

Middle School

- Synchronous, live whole group instruction will occur at least twice a week in each content area (ELA and Literature may be combined in one block period of time).
- Small group and differentiated instruction for individual students should be scheduled as part of synchronous learning times as often as necessary.



- Students may receive individual or small group instruction in any content area as needed, at the discretion of the teacher and/or school leader.
- Asynchronous learning will take place to schedule time for independent project work or completion of assignments.
- Live session for specials will occur as directed by the school leader.

High School

- Students will follow their daily class schedules in block format as directed by each high school.

DAILY TIME ALLOTMENTS

*In a remote or blended learning environment, considerations must be taken regarding recommended screen time at various age levels. Balancing synchronous and asynchronous instruction is imperative. Keeping this in mind while complying with minimal instructional minutes to constitute a school day, the following **guidelines** should be used in a remote learning phase:*

- Kindergarten through 2nd grade – minimum 90 instructional minutes (not necessarily consecutive)
- 3rd through 5th grade – minimum 180 instructional minutes (not necessarily consecutive)
- 6th through 12th grade – minimum 240 instructional minutes (not necessarily consecutive)

Seeking a balance between academic growth and social-emotional development, middle schools and high schools may want to consider postponing remote start times to 9:00AM.

LESSON CONTENT

Transitioning to remote learning can be extremely successful if sufficient time for planning is provided. Remote learning does not suggest that the integrity or rigor of any one content area should be compromised or sacrificed. Content needs to be engaging, align with existing lessons, and should be easy to navigate for both teacher and student. In a remote setting, it is the intent to ensure a continuum of learning, advancing the curriculum at each grade level.

Many students are now familiar with digital content but may not be accustomed to the methods this year's teachers may employ. The more confident teachers are with the platform they choose to use to teach a content, the more effectively they will teach the students. To the greatest extent possible, students must effectively grasp the content and successfully engage in learning to demonstrate mastery of skills and objectives taught. Using existing digital resources that are familiar such as subscriptions or accompanying text adoptions, are the best options for beginning remote learning. The goal is to be as seamless as possible in transitioning between in-person and remote learning with the least disruption to lesson and unit flow.



Lessons should be planned as units to establish the broad standards with integration of Catholic social teachings, objectives, and specific skills students will need to master to successfully learn the objective. Units of study should incorporate essential learning targets as well as formative and summative assessments that can be used in a remote or in-person classroom setting.

Teaching in a remote environment is harder and learning takes longer. Grading in a remote learning setting will not look the same as an assessment administered in-person. Plan for teaching the essential learning targets and how students will be able to demonstrate understanding remotely. AOH curriculum was written to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum as designed for in-person learning. For remote settings, strategic decisions must be made about prioritizing what is essential for students to know in order to advance their understanding and knowledge of a content area. In other words, not everything is assessed in isolation or separately.

Applying knowledge in long or short-term project or performance-based assessments is one strategy that works well and removes the opportunity for students to use work that may not be uniquely theirs. A great resource for teachers is

<https://my.pblworks.org/projects> .

PHYSICAL LAYOUT AND HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

The goal of all our schools is to bring all students back for in-person instruction to the extent that each school provides for the safety and health of students and staff. The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics have published a statement that acknowledges the importance of students resuming their education in an in-person setting and the harm that will result from further remote learning and isolation from their peers and other adults. (Appendix B)

Specific protocols are being instituted in each school that have proven effective to minimize or negate the risk of transmission of COVID-19, as well as other harmful viruses. The following accommodations are required in each school building:

Masks

- All adults who enter the building must wear a mask or be supplied with a face covering that covers their nose and mouth.
- Students in grades K-12 must wear masks during the school day with scheduled mask breaks. Students are asked to bring their own masks to school. Schools will maintain a supply of extra masks for students as needed.
- All students and staff who are able to be compliant with cloth face coverings or masks will be asked to wear them over their nose and mouth, particularly when in close proximity to other staff and students where social distancing is not possible. Certain exceptions to this requirement include anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- All students and staff must wear masks at all times when in common areas of the school building including hallways, stairwells, restrooms, and other common areas.



Physical Distancing

- Classes will utilize outdoor space when possible.
- Unnecessary furniture, rugs, and items that cannot be easily sanitized will be removed.
- Desks will be spaced three to six feet apart.
- If a small group meeting takes place, students will be required to wear masks and sit three to six feet apart.
- Classes will be organized into cohorts or “bubbles” to minimize crossover among students and adults within the school.
- To the extent possible, students will remain in one classroom to contain the use of desks and other resources to one cohort of students.
- Schools will stagger opening days to allow small cohorts to enter school prior to full attendance to understand the new protocols and policies in place as well the change in routines.
- Schools are encouraged to stagger the start time of different cohorts throughout the school year to minimize the number of students entering the school at one time.
- One-way flow procedures will be established in hallways and stairwells to the extent possible.
- Students’ movements will be limited throughout the school building.
- Schools will establish procedures for limiting proximity while using cubicles and/or lockers.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

- Sanitizing stations will be set up at all entrances to the school.
- All playground equipment will be cleaned after each cohort of students uses equipment in recess or physical education.
- Each student will have his/her own set of classroom manipulatives and/or supplies. Shared supplies among student will be prohibited to the extent feasible. Any shared item will be disinfected between use.
- Access to frequent handwashing and/or sanitizing stations in or near classrooms and common areas will be provided.
- Restrooms will be cleaned *at least* twice a day.
- If students eat lunch in their classroom, desks will be cleaned before and after lunch. Students who eat in a cafeteria will be seated six feet apart.
- Desks and commonly touched surfaces will be cleaned at the end of every school day. Schools will follow CSDE recommendations for cleaning and sanitizing. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/FAQ-schools-child-care.pdf>)
- Schools are strongly advised against using a fogger to disinfect. UV lights and electrostatic disinfecting machines are most effective, however, Lysol also disinfects effectively.



Note: DPH advises against disinfectant fogging/misting/spraying machines in schools and office buildings for several reasons. Disinfectant products are not benign and many are known to be respiratory and dermal (skin) sensitizers and asthmagens. The spraying or fogging of disinfectants in large quantities in school settings may lead to increased adverse respiratory and dermal issues for both the custodial or other staff performing the spraying as well as student and staff occupants of the building (DPH, 2020).

Health

- Schools will work with local health officials and/or school nurses to develop and institute procedures for individuals who are ill or are suspected to have been in contact with someone who is affected by COVID-19.
- All non-essential uniform items that cannot be washed daily such as ties, blazers, etc. will not be required.

ATTENDANCE

*Schools that have to transition into a remote learning environment, regardless of how long the period of time, are expected to track attendance **daily** to the degree that their school management system allows. Monitoring attendance requires tracking and reporting each student's time both in the school and during engagement in remote learning. The following are guidelines to consider when creating school protocols.*

Each school's remote learning plan during yellow and red phase must include the school's attendance requirements, including how the school will document participation in learning opportunities. Schools have options for how to record attendance daily and should strive for a consistent policy for determining attendance across all classrooms and grades in the school. Attendance may require a three-tier approach to account for the differences in instruction: in-person instruction, synchronous remote learning, and asynchronous remote learning. In a yellow phase or blended model, a combination of all three may have to be considered.

Attendance During In-Person Instruction

Attendance related to in-school instruction should be taken in the same manner as it normally is when students are in school. For students who choose to participate through live streaming, attendance will be monitored as though they were in the classroom.



Attendance During Remote Synchronous Instruction

This method replicates the current in-school method of taking daily attendance. In a remote synchronous learning environment, students who are **logged in** at the teacher's scheduled official class time are marked remote synchronous present for that day (RSP), and students who are not logged in at the teacher's scheduled official class time are marked remote synchronous absent for that day (RSA). Some online school management systems may not allow you to make these changes in attendance. In that case, a comment can be made to indicate the absence occurred during a remote synchronous class.

Teachers will take and post attendance in the school's management platform for attendance as if the students were physically present in the classroom.

Just as with traditional in-school attendance, official attendance will be taken at a certain time determined by the school's policy for each grade level. If the student is not participating remotely, the student would be marked absent for the day.

Attendance During Remote Asynchronous Instruction or Hybrid Blended Model

In developing remote asynchronous plans, schools should consider evidence of participation (or lack thereof) to measure attendance with consistent expectations communicated to the students. Evidence of participation may include, but is not limited to:

- Daily logins with the teacher
- Daily interactions with the teacher to acknowledge attendance
i.e.: messages, emails, text messages, telephone calls, video chats, etc.
- Assignment completion

These methods allow schools the flexibility to determine daily attendance through an approved plan for providing high-quality instructional practices with daily engagement measures. Attendance can be determined through asynchronous instructional methods OR through a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instruction together.

For students who typically attend school on campus but may periodically generate daily attendance via a remote asynchronous instructional method due to extended medical absence, quarantine or accommodations that allow for extended remote asynchronous learning, should be coded for remote based on their schedule.

For students who opt to learn from home in a streamed classroom, daily attendance will be taken as if in class. Students should not have the option of choosing daily if learning will be streamed or in-person. Opting to stream a school day should be planned either for a full term marking period or mid-term period so not to disrupt the learning environment in the class and for the student.



Measuring Daily Attendance in an Asynchronous Schedule:

A typical default for local school/student management systems is to assume that students are in attendance. Absences are entered into the system based on occurrence.

Student engagement with instruction or other instructional avenues and/or any daily contact by the teacher with a student focused on supporting or monitoring student academic progress, as defined by the approved asynchronous instructional plan, will establish daily attendance. A student will be considered absent if the student does not have documented engagement with the unit and/or daily contact with the teacher, and/or documentation of completion/turn in of daily assignments.

A teacher or school staff member will input the student's daily attendance into the student management system for the a/synchronous method, based on the student's daily engagement with the teacher or other instructional avenue and/or the daily contact with the teacher, by marking the student **remote synchronous or asynchronous present or absent** on that day.

Excused Absences:

In a remote learning environment, certain considerations must be taken into account to determine absences. Factors to consider include but are not limited to:

- Temporary internet outage for individual students or households;
- Unexpected technical difficulties for individual students such a password resets, software upgrading, or Wi-Fi connectivity issues during a teacher-led synchronous lesson;
- Student absence during COVID-19 until alternative arrangements can be made;
- Additional flexibilities to support students and families.

Medically Excused Absence:

A school policy for a medical reason during this pandemic may be:

“A medically excused absence occurs anytime a student is out of school due to illness or medical visit. Medical excuses will be accepted in the form of doctor's note within five school days of the absence or parent call-in on the day of the absence. A student may have up to 10 medically excused absences without a doctor's note, but with a parent call-in. Medical excused absences will be accepted through this process for students participating both in-person and remotely. This policy will be extended beyond 10 days if the student or someone in the student's family is in quarantine due to COVID-19 or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.”

Schools must ensure that attendance policies, as much as practicable, do not penalize staff or students who may contract COVID-19.



ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY

More so now than ever, the need for building community and safe, trusting and caring relationships is critical. Students who have been isolated due to constraints resulting from social distancing and quarantine situations have produced increased cases of anxiety, stress, and depression or detachment from activities. Increasingly, students are refusing to engage in school work due to a lack of social and emotional connections. Our schools must make every effort to counterbalance these harmful effects by building community, fellowship, and opportunities to make personal connections in all learning environments, whether in-person or remote.

Teachers can begin by establishing common attitudes, interests, expectations and goals for the class that value the voice of every student. Every student must feel that he/she can contribute positively and bring valuable input and contributions to the class.

There are many ways teachers build community in their individual classes or classrooms. Some methods include but are limited to the following:

- Arriving early or staying late to speak with students during class meetings;
- Playing music before class starts;
- Engaging students in conversations before instruction begins that ask how they doing, what their days are like, what is going well and what can improve, and other questions that allow them to express how they are feeling or managing the remote setting.
- Giving students an opportunity to share personally through 'introduce yourself' discussion board posts, 'getting to know you' activities, or starting class with an open question.

Adversity and stress directly correlate with brain development. Creating communities that establish a foundation for supporting healthy, whole-child development is essential to our mission as Catholic schools. Creating opportunities for students to be seen and heard, to share their thoughts and ideas especially during synchronous class meetings promotes the social emotional development of students and recognizes them as precious children of God.

This is a time that calls for healing and a conversion of mind and heart. Building community and trusting relationships is paramount to teaching standards or covering content in a curriculum. **Our schools remain committed to building community whether remotely or in-person. Building community reinforces we are one family united in Christ.** Our schools nurture a culture of inclusiveness and justice, mindful that students may return to school in need of healing in mind and heart.

Whether the school year begins in-person, remotely, or a combination of both, the priority for teachers must be to first build community - connections and trusting relationships with their students. Administrators must do all they can to support teachers in this effort and find ways, in this time of social distancing, to love creatively and hope boundlessly. Students must know they are loved unconditionally. Learning will happen.



However, entering this school year seeking first to heal and build relationships will be the first step to minimizing the effects of this time of pandemic crisis in our schools and in our world.

Pope Francis reminds us: “Joy. Tenderness. Hope. Rage against hatred and injustice. Delight in kindness and goodness. Confidence that ‘all will be well,’ because God’s love will triumph in the end.”



I. Cleaning and Sanitizing:

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
* Cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, and ventilating learning spaces, surfaces, and any other areas used by students (i.e., restrooms, drinking fountains, hallways, and transportation)					
Other cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, and ventilation practices					

II. Social Distancing:

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
* Classroom/ learning space occupancy that allows for 6 feet of separation among students and staff throughout the day, to the maximum extent feasible					
* Restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings					
* Hygiene practices for students and staff including the manner and frequency of hand- washing and other best practices					

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
* Posting signs, in highly visible locations, that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs					
* Identifying and restricting non-essential visitors and volunteers					
* Handling sporting activities for recess and physical education classes consistent with the CDC Considerations for Sports					

APPENDIX A - Return to In-Person Instruction Strategy 2020-2021

School/Town:

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
Limiting the sharing of materials among students including manipulatives					
Staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways					
Adjusting transportation schedules and practices to create social distance between students					
Limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces, and interactions between groups of students					

III. Monitoring Student & Staff Health:

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
* Monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure					
* Returning isolated or quarantined staff, students, or visitors to school					
Notifying staff, families, and the public of school closures and within-school-year changes in safety protocols					
Other monitoring and screening practices					

IV. Other Health Considerations:

Requirements	Action Steps under Yellow Phase	Action Steps under Green Phase	Lead Individual and Position	Materials, Resources, and or Supports Needed	PD Required (Y/N)
* Protecting students and staff at higher risk for severe illness					
* Use of face coverings (masks or face shields) by all staff					
* Use of face coverings (masks or face shields) by older students (as appropriate)					
Unique safety protocols for students with complex needs or other vulnerable individuals					

Return to In-Person Instruction Governing Body Affirmation Statement

The School Advisory Board for (INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL) reviewed and approved the Phased School Return to In-Person Instruction Plan on (INSERT DATE: MONTH, DAY, YEAR).

The plan was approved by a vote of:

____ Yes
____ No

Affirmed on: (INSERT DATE: MONTH, DAY, YEAR)

By:

(Signature * of Board Chair or Pastor)

(Signature * of President or Principal)

*Electronic signatures on this document are acceptable.

APPENDIX B



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

The Importance of Reopening America's Schools this Fall Updated July 23, 2020

As families and policymakers make decisions about their children returning to school, it is important to consider the full spectrum of benefits and risks of both in-person and virtual learning options. Parents are understandably concerned about the safety of their children at school in the wake of COVID-19. The best available evidence indicates if children become infected, they are far less likely to suffer severe symptoms.[1],[2],[3] Death rates among school-aged children are much lower than among adults. At the same time, the harms attributed to closed schools on the social, emotional, and behavioral health, economic well-being, and academic achievement of children, in both the short- and long-term, are well-known and significant. Further, the lack of in-person educational options disproportionately harms low-income and minority children and those living with disabilities. These students are far less likely to have access to private instruction and care and far more likely to rely on key school-supported resources like food programs, special education services, counseling, and after-school programs to meet basic developmental needs.[4]

Aside from a child's home, no other setting has more influence on a child's health and well-being than their school. The in-person school environment does the following:

- *provides educational instruction;*
- *supports the development of social and emotional skills;*
- *creates a safe environment for learning;*
- *addresses nutritional needs; and*
- *facilitates physical activity.*
- *This paper discusses each of these critical functions, following a brief summary of current studies regarding COVID-19 and children.*

COVID-19 and Children

The best available evidence indicates that COVID-19 poses relatively low risks to school-aged children. Children appear to be at lower risk for contracting COVID-19 compared to adults. To put this in perspective, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of July 17, 2020, the United States reported that children and adolescents under 18 years old account for under 7 percent of COVID-19 cases and less than 0.1 percent of COVID-19-related deaths.[5] Although relatively rare, flu-related deaths in children occur every year. From 2004-2005 to 2018-2019, flu-related deaths in children reported to CDC during regular flu seasons ranged from 37 to 187 deaths. During the H1N1 pandemic (April 15, 2009 to October 2, 2010), 358 pediatric deaths were reported to CDC. So far in this pandemic, deaths of children are less than in each of the last five flu seasons, with only 64.† Additionally, some children with certain underlying medical conditions, however, are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.*



Scientific studies suggest that COVID-19 transmission among children in schools may be low. International studies that have assessed how readily COVID-19 spreads in schools also reveal low rates of transmission when community transmission is low. Based on current data, the rate of infection among younger school children, and from students to teachers, has been low, especially if proper precautions are followed. There have also been few reports of children being the primary source of COVID-19 transmission among family members.[6],[7],[8] This is consistent with data from both virus and antibody testing, suggesting that children are not the primary drivers of COVID-19 spread in schools or in the community.[9],[10],[11] No studies are conclusive, but the available evidence provides reason to believe that in-person schooling is in the best interest of students, particularly in the context of appropriate mitigation measures similar to those implemented at essential workplaces.

Educational Instruction

Extended school closure is harmful to children. It can lead to severe learning loss, and the need for in-person instruction is particularly important for students with heightened behavioral needs.[12],[13] Following the wave of school closures in March 2020 due to COVID-19, academic learning slowed for most children and stopped for some. A survey of 477 school districts by the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education found that, "far too many schools are leaving learning to chance." [13] Just one in three school districts expected teachers to provide instruction, track student engagement, or monitor academic progress for all students, and wealthy school districts were twice as likely to have such expectations compared to low-income districts.[13]

We also know that, for many students, long breaks from in-person education are harmful to student learning. For example, the effects of summer breaks from in-person schooling on academic progress, known as "summer slide," are also well-documented in the literature. According to the Northwest Evaluation Association, in the summer following third grade, students lose nearly 20 percent of their school-year gains in reading and 27 percent of their school-year gains in math.[14] By the summer after seventh grade, students lose on average 39 percent of their school-year gains in reading and 50 percent of their school-year gains in math.[14] This indicates that learning losses are large and become even more severe as a student progresses through school. The prospect of losing several months of schooling, compared to the few weeks of summer vacation, due to school closure likely only makes the learning loss even more severe.

Disparities in educational outcomes caused by school closures are a particular concern for low-income and minority students and students with disabilities. Many low-income families do not have the capacity to facilitate distance learning (e.g. limited or no computer access, limited or no internet access), and may have to rely on school-based services that support their child's academic success.

A study by researchers at Brown and Harvard Universities assessed how 800,000 students used Zearn, an online math program, both before and after schools closed in March 2020.[15] Data showed that through late April, student progress in math decreased by about half, with the negative impact more pronounced in low-income zip codes.[15] Persistent achievement gaps that already existed before COVID-19, such as disparities across income levels and races, can worsen and cause serious, hard-to-repair damage to children's education outcomes.[15],[16] Finally, remote learning makes absorbing information more difficult for students with disabilities, developmental delays, or other cognitive disabilities. In particular, students who are deaf, hard of hearing, have low vision, are blind, or have other learning disorders (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)) and other physical and mental disabilities have had significant difficulties with remote learning.[17]

Social and Emotional Skill Development

Schools play a critical role in supporting the whole child, not just their academic achievement. In addition to a structure for learning, schools provide a stable and secure environment for developing social skills and peer relationships. Social interaction at school among children in grades PK-12 is particularly important for the development of language, communication, social, emotional, and interpersonal skills.[18]



Extended school closures are harmful to children's development of social and emotional skills. Important social interactions that facilitate the development of critical social and emotional skills are greatly curtailed or limited when students are not physically in school. In an in-person school environment, children more easily learn how to develop and maintain friendships, how to behave in groups, and how to interact and form relationships with people outside of their family. In school, students are also able to access support systems needed to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate others' perspectives, and make responsible decisions. This helps reinforce children's feelings of school connectedness, or their belief that teachers and other adults at school care about them and their well-being. Such routine in-person contacts provide opportunities to facilitate social-emotional development that are difficult, if not impossible, to replicate through distance learning.[18],[19],[20]

Additionally, extended closures can be harmful to children's mental health and can increase the likelihood that children engage in unhealthy behaviors. An environment where students feel safe and connected, such as a school, is associated with lower levels of depression, thoughts about suicide, social anxiety, and sexual activity, as well as higher levels of self-esteem and more adaptive use of free time [19],[20] A longitudinal study of 476 adolescents over 3 years starting in the 6th grade found school connectedness to be especially protective for those who had lower connectedness in other areas of their lives, such as home, and to reduce their likelihood of substance use.[20]

Further, a review of studies conducted on pandemics found a strong association between length of quarantine and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, avoidance behavior, and anger. Another review published this year found that post-traumatic stress scores of children and parents in quarantine were four times higher than those not quarantined.[21],[22]

In-person schooling provides children with access to a variety of mental health and social services, including speech language therapy, and physical or occupational therapy to help the physical, psychological, and academic well-being of the child.[23], [24],[25],[26] Further, school counselors are trained in the mental health needs of children and youth and can recognize signs of trauma that primary caregivers are less able to see because they themselves are experiencing the same family stresses. School counselors can then coordinate with teachers to implement interventions to offer children a reassuring environment for regaining the sense of order, security, and normalcy.

Without in-person schooling, many children can lose access to these important services. For example, we know that, even outside the context of school closures, children often do not receive the mental health treatment they need. Among children ages 9-17, it is estimated that 21 percent, or more than 14 million children, experience some type of mental health condition.[27] Yet only 16 percent of those with a condition receive any treatment.[23] Of those, 70-80 percent received such care in a school setting.[23] School closures can be particularly damaging for the 7.4 million American children suffering from a serious emotional disturbance. For those individuals who have a diagnosable mental, behavioral or emotional condition that substantially interferes with or limits their social functioning, schools play an integral role in linking them to care and necessary support services.

For children with intellectual or physical disabilities, nearly all therapies and services are received through schools. These vital services are difficult to provide through distance learning models. As a result, more children with disabilities have received few to no services while schools have been closed.

Safety

Extended school closures deprive children who live in unsafe homes and neighborhoods of an important layer of protection from neglect as well as physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment and abuse. A 2018 Department of Health and Human Services report found that teachers and other educational staff were responsible for more than one-fifth of all reported child abuse cases—more than any other category of reporter.[28] During the COVID-19 school closures, however, there has been a sharp decline in reports of suspected maltreatment, but tragically a notable increase in evidence of abuse when children are seen for services. For example, the Washington, D.C. Child and



Family Services Agency recorded a 62 percent decrease in child abuse reporting calls between mid- March and April 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019, but saw more severe presentation of child abuse cases in emergency rooms.[29] Children who live in a home or neighborhood where neglect, violence, or abuse occur, but who are not physically in school, are deprived of access to trained school professionals who can readily identify the signs of trauma and provide needed support and guidance.[30],[31],[32],[33],[34]

Nutrition

Extended school closures can be harmful to the nutritional health of children. Schools are essential to meeting the nutritional needs of children with many consuming up to half their daily calories at school. Nationwide more than 30 million children participate in the National School Lunch Program and nearly 15 million participate in the School Breakfast Program.[35],[36] For children from low-income families, school meals are an especially critical source of affordable, healthy foods. While schools have implemented strategies to continue meal services throughout periods of school closures, it is difficult to maintain this type of school nutrition program over the long-term. This is a particularly severe problem for the estimated 11 million food-insecure children, living in the United States.

Physical Activity

When schools are closed, children lose access to important opportunities for physical activity. Many children may not be sufficiently physically active outside of the context of in-school physical education (PE) and other school-based activities. Beyond PE, with schools closed, children may not have sufficient opportunities to participate in organized and safe physical activity. They also lose access to other school-based physical activities, including recess, classroom engagements, and after school programs.

The loss of opportunities for physical activity from school closures, especially when coupled with potentially diminished nutrition, can be particularly harmful to children. Physical inactivity and poor nutrition among children are major risk factors for childhood obesity and other chronic health conditions. Over 75 percent of children and adolescents in the United States do not meet the daily physical activity level recommendations (60 minutes or more), and nearly half exceed 2 hours per day in sedentary behavior. Current models estimate that childhood obesity rate may increase by 2.4 percent if school closures continue to December 2020.[37],[38],[39]

Conclusion

Schools are an important part of the infrastructure of our communities, as they provide safe, supportive learning environments for students, employ teachers and other staff, and enable parents, guardians, and caregivers to work. Schools also provide critical services that help meet the needs of children and families, especially those who are disadvantaged, through supporting the development of social and emotional skills, creating a safe environment for learning, identifying and addressing neglect and abuse, fulfilling nutritional needs, and facilitating physical activity. School closure disrupts the delivery of in-person instruction and critical services to children and families, which has negative individual and societal ramifications. The best available evidence from countries that have opened schools indicates that COVID-19 poses low risks to school-aged children, at least in areas with low community transmission, and suggests that children are unlikely to be major drivers of the spread of the virus. Reopening schools creates opportunity to invest in the education, well-being, and future of one of America's greatest assets—our children—while taking every precaution to protect students, teachers, staff and all their families.



*Some children have developed multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) after exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). (<https://www.cdc.gov/mis-c/cases/index.html>) In one targeted surveillance study for MIS-C associated with SARS-CoV-2, however, the majority of children who were hospitalized with COVID-related MIS-C (70 percent) had recovered by the end date of the study period. (Feldstein LR et al.. Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in US Children and Adolescents. N Engl J Med. 2020;10.1056/NEJMoa2021680)

†CDC COVID Data Tracker. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/>. Accessed on July 21, 2020.



APPENDIX C

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS IN FALL 2020 SUMMARY

NOTE #1: This content was adapted from a document written solely for students enrolled in public schools.

NOTE #2: The following are **Requirements**, as defined by the Office of the Governor, the CSDE, and/ or the Connecticut State Department of Public Health, identified as necessary for the LEA to complete or comply with in order to open schools successfully in the fall. In the Archdiocese of Hartford, schools are expected to meet or exceed these requirements to the extent feasible. These should be used to inform and guide your own school's plans for Return to In-Person Instruction. In this document, the term LEA should refer to your own school, and CSDE refers to OEEC.

NOTE #3: Items highlighted in **yellow** should be more duly noted. Text in **green** has been added by OEEC. However, please note all bulleted items.

NOTE #4: CDC and CSDE are continually revising guidelines as data regarding the spread of COVID becomes available. The three phases of the RII plan should be drafted in such a way as to allow for the smooth transition from one phase to another, ensuring continuous and safe learning to take place and safeguard the health of students and school personnel. Ongoing concise and clear communication will be a key component to the plan.

NOTE #5: To activate links below, go to the full, original document at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/CTReopeningSchools.pdf>
CDC Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

#1 Temporarily Choosing Not to Participate

Requirements

- Plan for parents and students who may temporarily choose not to participate in the return to school. There are defined requirements when participation of a student in the schoolhouse is limited due to a verified medical reason. However, **parents and guardians may also voluntarily choose for students to temporarily engage in learning from home for a variety of other reasons**. LEAs should develop **temporary support options** for students who continue remote learning from home. In developing these plans, options include but are not limited to:
 - Consider how retired teachers and/or teachers who voluntarily identify as “high risk” or otherwise need to be accommodated outside of the school house may support operational needs via remote learning, including but not limited to the following:
 - ❖ Working with students (virtually) who are unable to attend school;
 - ❖ Developing and implementing district professional development (PD) (virtual or in person);
 - ❖ Assisting with continued PD to train teachers who need assistance with best practices for virtual teaching and learning.
 - ❖ Serving as online tutors for those who need additional assistance.



#2 School Liaison, Communications Plans, and Data Collection

Requirements

School Liaison:

- **Designate an employee to serve as a COVID-19 Health and Safety Compliance Liaison.** This designated person will be responsible for engaging with students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators to answer questions or concerns about health and safety requirements regarding COVID-19 concerns (e.g., school nurse). All school staff and families should know and have the contact information for the designee. This role can be assigned to an administrator or someone with the authority to address compliance issues.

Communications Plan:

- **Put systems in place to communicate the most up to date policies and protocols related to the considerations herein, for staff, students, and families.** Schools should leverage multiple communication methods (mail, e-mail, phone calls, text messaging, **video-messaging**, social media, and school websites). Ensure all policies and protocols are clearly marked with version and date, as they may change over time. Consider a COVID-19 landing page in which communication and guidance can be updated regularly.
- Make communications plans available in relevant languages of families in the community, as well as accessible to those with visual and/or hearing impairments.
- Ensure the development of plans for ongoing two-way communication with the school community (staff, families, and students) about any new policies and/or protocols *prior* to reopening, any time there is a significant policy change, and upon re-entry if a school closes temporarily during the year. This should include feedback and consultation regarding the implementation of those policies.
- Develop expectations around frequency of communication, and ensure detailed updates are provided any time critical information regarding policies, protocols, or health data changes.
- Put in place a plan for how the community will be notified of any changed policies, need to cancel classes, or other changes or restrictions.

Data Collection:

Prioritize gathering information from families prior to reopening. Collect information from families to properly plan for resuming classes in the fall. For example, assess whether certain families will choose not to participate and instead continue with remote learning, and, if so, how that may affect facilities and operations planning.

#3 Facilities

Classroom Layout

Requirements

- **Maximize social distancing between student workstations, achieving 6 feet when feasible,** when determining the classroom layout. Desks should face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or students should sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart.
- Where necessary, assess other space that may be repurposed for instruction in the school, in municipal or other community space, or if the school will require additional modular space.
- **Maximize space between the teacher and students due to the risk of increased droplets from teachers during instruction.** If a teacher removes face covering or mask during instruction, spacing should be increased beyond six feet. For teachers who stay seated, a physical barrier may be an effective option.
- **A face shield over a face mask provides an extra level of protection.**



Reopening of Facilities Before First Day of Classes

Requirements

Comply with DPH [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting of Schools](#) during COVID-19.
Comply with DPH [Return to Service Guidance](#) for Building Water Systems.

Signs and Messages

Requirements

Ensure all signs and messages related to stopping the spread are accessible for students with disabilities and in languages appropriate for the school population.

Ventilation

Requirements

Comply with DPH [Guidance for School Systems for the Operation of Central and non-Central Ventilation Systems](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training Related to Facilities

Requirements

- Identify the training needs of staff related to health and safety protocols; perform such training prior to the first day of classes. If the school nurse is unable to provide the training along with the blood-borne pathogen training, OEEC will make available a video that can serve as training tool.
- Plan an in-person or online training that includes: social distancing; cleaning protocols; and hygiene practices. Require attendance by all students and staff, and make available to families who are interested. Consider repeating this training during the first months that school reopens, and as needed.
- Ensure training is provided to substitutes or others who may enter the school outside of the first day or typical calendar start.

Bathroom Protocols

Requirements

- Comply with DPH [guidance for cleaning and disinfecting of schools](#) during COVID-19.
- Maximize use of disposable towels in lieu of hand dryers, due to ventilation considerations. Turn off and avoid use of hand dryers.
- Restrooms must be cleaned at least twice a day (per CDC guidelines).

Alternative Disinfection Methods

- The efficacy of alternative disinfection methods, such as ultrasonic waves, high intensity UV radiation, and LED blue light against COVID-19 virus is not known.
- EPA does not routinely review the safety or efficacy of pesticidal devices, such as UV lights, LED lights, or ultrasonic devices. Therefore, EPA cannot confirm whether, or under what circumstances, such products might be effective against the spread of COVID-19.



- CDC does not recommend the use of sanitizing tunnels. There is no evidence that they are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. *Chemicals used in sanitizing tunnels could cause skin, eye, or respiratory irritation or damage.*
- CDC only recommends use of the surface disinfectants identified on List Nexternal iconexternal icon against the virus that causes COVID-19.

#4 Daily Operations

Flexibility and Compartmentalization of Protective Measures

Requirements

- Develop the policies and protocols related to facilities and operations with the understanding that schools may need to react quickly to changing conditions.
- Ensure options to increase, or relax restrictions are available throughout the school year to respond effectively to changes in public health data. This requires compartmentalized solutions that can be deployed or recalled in a timely and organized way.

Class Groups and Teams (Cohorts)

The purpose of cohorting is to limit the number of students who are exposed to or may be diagnosed with COVID-19 if there is community transmission in a school. Maintaining stable cohorts helps to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19.

A “cohort” is a group or team of students and educators with consistent members that stay together throughout the school day. *In many of our schools, a single grade can be viewed as a cohort.*

Other Individuals Entering the School Building

Requirements

Develop consistent policies to address when clubs, before- and after-school programs, or other voluntary groups may be allowed to use school space. Include ways to safely allow access for before- and after-school and childcare programs.

#5 Child Nutrition

Requirements

Schools and institutions that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program, and Special Milk Program (SMP) as applicable, must continue to determine eligibility for and make available free and reduced-price meals and snacks and free milk to all eligible students.

#6 Buses, Vans and Student Transportation Vehicles

Requirements

Protective strategies for bus transportation should align with the forthcoming tiered system established by DPH to assist leaders define the decision-making approach applied to individual school districts. *This includes buses used for athletics and other school events.*

Where either a vaccine is available or effective treatments for COVID-19 are available, bus transportation can operate as it did prior to the pandemic, with no restrictions.

Where there is low transmission risk in the community and some restrictions are in place in schools, buses will be able to operate up to full capacity. LEAs who believe they may need to operate buses at



high capacity levels should prioritize assessing alternative options and increase monitoring of the mitigating strategies. *Passengers will be required to wear a face mask or cloth face covering that completely covers the nose and mouth during transit. The passenger's face covering must be in place prior to boarding the bus and must be kept in place until they are completely off the bus.* Passengers should load into the bus from the back row to the front (where the first passengers onto the bus sit in the back row) and then unload the bus in a controlled manner upon arrival at the school from front to back by seat. This will reduce the number of people passengers walk by as they get on the bus and will prevent crowding in the center aisle when the bus arrives for unloading.

Passenger density should be significantly reduced when there is moderate spread, because schools will be employing remote blended learning when in this status. Bus passengers should be spaced with family members sitting together and non-family members should be spaced 6 feet apart utilizing alternating diagonal seating.

#7 Standard Public Health Practices and Adequate Supplies

Requirements

- Ensure that students are educated and engaged in the new expectations related to all public health policies and protocols. As part of this requirement, assess the best approach to communicating the information for the age group, and plan to set aside time at the beginning of the school year, as well as frequent reminders, to review the new policies and protocols.
- Familiarize all participants of the standard public health practices used to prevent the spread of diseases. These practices include, but are not limited to:
 - social distancing,
 - frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer,
 - use of face coverings that completely cover the nose and mouth,
 - respiratory and cough etiquette, and
 - enhanced cleaning/disinfection of surfaces.
- Provide adequate supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol (for staff and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings (as feasible), and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans. *Do NOT use any brand of hand sanitizer that contains methanol.*

#8 Immunizations and Health Assessments

Requirements

- **Immunizations:** [Guidance from the Department of Public Health was issued dated June 17, 2020](#) emphasizing the importance of protecting students by staying up to date on immunizations.
- **Health Assessments:** [Guidance from the CSDE was issued dated June 26, 2020](#) outlining the requirements for [Health Assessments](#) prior to students enrolling in school.

#9 Reporting Illnesses and Addressing Vulnerable Populations

Requirements

Staying at Home

- Instruct students and staff to inform the school if they are sick with COVID-19 related symptoms, particularly if they had a known contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have also had contact with the school population. They must stay home when they are sick, especially if they have COVID-19 symptoms such as fever and cough. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has provided [guidance](#) that confirms that, during a pandemic, it is permissible to ask



employees if they are experiencing symptoms of the pandemic virus (such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.) Employers must maintain all information about employee or student illness as a confidential medical record.

- Develop consistent protocols for information reporting, and a point person to appropriately receive and safeguard this information, such as the school nurse, district nursing supervisor, or principal.
- Educate staff and families about when to [stay home](#). Schools should properly communicate the content of this or any updated guidance.
 - Instruct staff and students (or their parents and guardians) to perform a self-assessment prior to leaving for school to identify fever and other possible COVID-19 symptoms. Communicate this expectation and provide parents with reminders about the [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#) that require keeping their students at home. Examples include a check-list for parents or a web-based application such as Connecticut [How We Feel](#).
 - Establish and communicate school-wide sick protocols, including signs and symptoms of COVID-19, and temperature thresholds requiring students or staff to stay home.
 - Consistent with the applicable laws and school policies, offer options for school and work to staff and students with special healthcare needs (e.g., remote learning options, alternate or modified job responsibilities).

#10 Social Distancing

Requirements

- In conjunction with the considerations outlined concerning classroom and hallway social distancing rules, **assist staff and students to maintain social distancing between individuals** to reduce the transmission of the virus per the public health guidelines at that time.
- Be prepared to adjust the approach to social distancing if guidance from the CDC or DPH changes due to shifting public health data or evolving understanding of COVID-19 disease, including transmission.

#11 Use of Face Coverings, Masks, and Face Shields

Requirements

- **Adopt policies requiring use of face coverings for all students and staff when they are inside the school building, with certain exceptions listed below.**
 - For anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance, face coverings and masks should not be required, [per CDC guidance](#).
 - For anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face covering, masks should not be required.
- Be prepared to provide a mask to any student or staff member who does not have one.

#12 Planning and Distribution of Information

Requirements

Include in the LEA reopening plan written protocols for monitoring of symptoms that could be related to COVID-19, with the goal of decreasing the risk of spreading or contracting the virus and maintaining oversight related to the pandemic while complying with relevant privacy and health laws.



#13 Containment Plan

Requirements

- Include in the LEA reopening plan written protocols for containment and immediate response if an individual has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, there is a known exposure, or a member of the school community has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19. The purpose of containment plans are to decrease the risks of spreading COVID-19, and shall include the following:
 - Immediate coordination with the local health department, including being ready to comply with requests for information from the local health department to assist with contact tracing.
 - Consideration of what signs and symptoms exhibited by students or staff would require their immediate dismissal from school; for what period of time; and conditions for their re-admittance to school.
- If any person who has been present in school has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, the local health department must be notified immediately. This can be done through the school nurse.
- Identify an “isolation room” (besides the health office) to accommodate students who exhibit symptoms consistent with COVID-19 until a parent or guardian arrives. Students should remain supervised in the isolation room. For the purposes of contact tracing, schools should log all persons who entered the room. The individual supervising the room must be equipped with proper PPE.
- Initiate recommended [CDC cleaning procedures](#) following a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Create a consistent policy for dismissal of students or staff who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 and must be dismissed from school. Include input, where appropriate, from the local health department, school medical advisor and school nurse supervisor.

#14 Cancellation of Classes

Requirements

- Develop a plan for school class cancellations and reopening to be implemented in the event that the superintendent, their designee, or state government suspends or cancels in-school classes for some or all participants.
- Notify and consult with the ~~OEEC~~ ~~CSDE~~ immediately if the LEA is contemplating class cancellations.
- Assume that any decision about school closure, reopening, or cancellation of school events will be made in coordination/collaboration with local health officials, and with the advice of the school medical advisor (if any) and school nurse supervisor.
- Anticipate that recommendations for the geographic scope (e.g., a single school, multiple schools, the full district, regionally), whether it will be partial or total, and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the community.
- Include a communication plan and clear policies for faculty and staff regarding individual roles and responsibilities in the event of a shutdown occurring during the school year.
- Prioritize ongoing educational opportunities when drafting the plan for shutdown. Materials for continuity of learning must be made available to allow for school sessions to continue remotely.



#15 Future Planning for Remote Blended Learning

Requirements

- Be prepared to provide remote blended learning opportunities immediately upon cancellation of in-school classes.
- Develop a plan for extended absences and communicate it with parents or guardians in the event of a second extended closure. Particular attention must be placed on communicating the distribution of food and devices or learning materials. Materials must be modified for use by students who are differently abled or multilingual.

#16 Physical Education, Athletics, Arts, and Extracurricular Activities

Requirements

- Follow all CDC, state, and local guidelines related to social distancing and disinfecting areas and equipment used for physical education and physical activity, including recess.
- Develop plans for the implementation of a physical education, fine arts, and music curriculum that consider the needs of all students, including focusing on activities, adaptations, and modifications of all education decisions to ensure the full inclusion by all students.

#17 Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health

Requirements

- Develop a detailed plan to reengage all students, staff and families. Particularly identify strategies to identify and engage populations and specific students that have been disengaged.
- Prepare staff to identify issues related to abuse and neglect in the context of the pandemic and comply with all mandated reporting requirements.

#18 After-school Programming

Requirements

Follow the requirements outlined in this document, as applicable, including but not limited to requiring the use of face coverings that cover the nose and mouth, and maximizing social distancing.

#19 Certification and Personnel Planning

Requirements

- Prepare with school human resources and board counsel to comply with legal and regulatory requirements related to personnel, including but not limited to the EEOC [guidance](#) related to the ADA and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Assess how to engage a full roster of staff, including potential substitute plan, and whether stipends or changes in substitute pay is required to support the needs of the school.



#20 Special Education

Requirements

- Prepare with the understanding that there has been no waiver of requirements under the IDEA for provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). During COVID-19 school closures, schools were required to provide FAPE consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students, as well as those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students. Schools may not have been able to provide all services in the same manner that they are typically provided. Federal disability law allows for flexibility in determining how to meet the individualized needs of students receiving special education services.
- NOTE: This was written solely for students enrolled in public schools.

