

A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a young boy in a teal t-shirt is seen from behind, with his hands raised. One hand is on his head, and the other is pointing upwards. In the background, a smiling teacher is holding a book, and another student in a red shirt is also raising their hand. The room is bright and has blue furniture.

**ALL HANDS ON DECK:  
GUIDANCE REGARDING  
REOPENING SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

## **National Education Association**

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

### **NEA Executive Officers**

Rebecca S. Pringle, President  
Princess R. Moss, Vice President  
Noel Candelaria, Secretary-Treasurer

### **NEA Executive Committee**

Eric R. Brown, Illinois  
Mark Jewell, North Carolina  
Shelly Moore Krajacic, Wisconsin  
Robert V. Rodriguez, California  
Christine Sampson-Clark, New Jersey  
Hanna Vaandering, Oregon

### **Office of the Executive Director**

Kim A. Anderson, Executive Director  
Karen M. White, Deputy Executive Director

### **NEA Education Policy & Practice**

Donna M. Harris-Aikens, Senior Director  
Alexis K. Holmes, Manager  
Elic A. Senter, Manager

In addition to the team in NEA Education Policy & Practice, colleagues contributing to this guidance represent the Center for Advocacy, Center for Enterprise Strategy, Center for Great Public Schools, Center for Organizing, Center for Social Justice, and Office of General Counsel.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction.....</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>I. Guiding Principles .....</b>                                   | <b>3</b>  |
| Principle 1: Health Expertise.....                                   | 4         |
| Principle 2: Educator Voice.....                                     | 4         |
| Principle 3: Access to Protection.....                               | 4         |
| Principle 4: Leading with Equity.....                                | 4         |
| Future Forward .....   | 5         |
| <b>II. Preparing to Reopen School Buildings .....</b>                | <b>6</b>  |
| Learn from Spring 2020 .....   | 6         |
| Ground Decisions in Science .....                                    | 7         |
| Plan According to Specific Needs of PreK-12 Schools and IHEs.....    | 9         |
| Implement a Detailed Plan for Reopening School Buildings.....        | 13        |
| <b>III. Helping Schools Succeed During COVID-19 .....</b>            | <b>21</b> |
| Create School Health Protocols .....                                 | 21        |
| Be Responsive to the Needs of Students and the School Community..... | 23        |
| Support Educator Success .....                                       | 27        |
| <b>IV. Future Forward .....</b>                                      | <b>30</b> |
| Health Expertise .....   | 30        |
| Educator Voice .....   | 30        |
| Access to Protection .....   | 31        |
| Leading with Equity .....  | 31        |
| <b>Next Steps and Call to Action.....</b>                            | <b>32</b> |
| <b>COVID-19: NEA’s 15-Point Checklist.....</b>                       | <b>33</b> |
| <b>References.....</b>   | <b>35</b> |



# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to our schools, our economy, and our nation's families, exacerbating racial inequities and placing a disproportionate burden on communities of color throughout the country. While physically opening schools at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year is the goal of most districts, the decision of when to reopen school buildings must be rooted in health and safety and not based on an arbitrary start date or any other priority. However, COVID-19 has also brought an opportunity to reimagine and reengineer the policies and processes that have benefited some students while not prioritizing other students, specifically under-resourced students; Indigenous, Black, and students of color; and students with disabilities.

This is an opportunity to intentionally plan for school success during COVID-19 and beyond with health, safety, and equity at the forefront. We encourage educators to seek out opportunities to engage in dialogue about how we can educate all students safely in the midst of the crisis. In this process, we also encourage all stakeholders to unlearn biases and deficit ideologies about students, parents, and communities. We advocate that educators move to practice the types of teaching that will benefit all learners.

The National Education Association (NEA) recognizes that each school building is unique and not all recommendations or items for consideration will be relevant to every building or campus where our members work. We welcome your feedback and suggestions. We invite you to share your thoughts on this document and subsequent guidance and recommendations. Email [futureofschools@nea.org](mailto:futureofschools@nea.org).

**"As we chart the path to the future, educators, parents, community leaders, elected officials, and educators must work together to ensure every student and every educator can learn and work in spaces that are safe, supportive, enriching, and equitable."**

—Becky Pringle, President, NEA

# I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

COVID-19 has put a spotlight on a hard truth that our members across the country already knew: Not all students have equitable access to the educators, resources, and tools they need. Our collective work must promote a vision for public education that advances inclusion, equity, and racial, economic, and social justice in our schools, association, and society.

We don't just want to "get back" to school. We want to make the schools our students return to *better*. We want a public school and higher education system fully committed to the learning of every single student and thoughtfully designed to achieve that end. We have a unique opportunity to create schools and campuses that are unequivocally resolute in their commitment to student learning, beacons of service and partnership to communities, and respected and sought-after institutions of employment. The aim is not adequacy; rather, it is productive excellence for all. The NEA recognizes an immediate need for concrete guidance on returning to school buildings. This document, "All Hands On Deck: Guidance Regarding Reopening School Buildings," reimagines our schools as just environments so that students and educators are safe and healthy, and they are able to teach and learn regardless of school, community, race, class, or ability.

Our guidance is rooted in four basic principles:

1. **Health Expertise:** Health and safety of all as advised by science is fundamental.
2. **Educator Voice:** Educators' voices and expertise are front and center as part of decision-making and implementation.
3. **Access to Protection:** Educators and students need consistently funded access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and the ability to disinfect surfaces regularly.
4. **Leading with Equity:** Achieving racial and social justice is imperative and not an expendable aspiration.

Our nation's public schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs) serve an incomparable role as pillars of our communities. As educators, we know the value of trusting relationships that educators have with students and the importance of face-to-face instruction. The NEA has compiled this guidance to ensure the safety of our members, students, and our most vulnerable communities while still providing a way forward so that our society can prosper and learning can resume in a face-to-face format when and how it is safe to do so.

## DEFINITIONS

**Educators** include classroom teachers, paraeducators and other education support professionals (ESPs), specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), librarians, administrators, and higher education faculty and staff.

**Education Support Professional (ESP)** means an individual employed in a professional career that falls into one of the following PreK-12 or higher education career categories: paraeducator, clerical services, custodial and maintenance services, transportation services, technical services, skilled trades services, security services, food services, and health and student services.

**Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)** means personnel who work with teachers, school support staff, parents, community members, and other education stakeholders to make sure students have the services they need to succeed academically and socially, inside and outside the classroom. SISP include professionals such as school counselors, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, library media specialists, speech pathologists, and others.

## Principle 1: Health Expertise

This global health crisis has highlighted the critical role public schools and IHEs play in the fabric of our society. Failure to prioritize safety and adequate staffing in public schools as school buildings reopen would create a public health risk that will only prolong the pandemic. The guidance produced by the federal government lacks the specificity and context required to support the unique needs of education communities across the country.



## Principle 2: Educator Voice

The NEA is drilling down on critical issues that education systems should consider as they prepare to physically welcome back educators and students. As states and districts begin to plan for the Fall 2020 semester, we want to make sure that educators are equipped with the tools needed to advocate on behalf of all students and themselves. More important, educators have extensive expertise in teaching and supporting students, and they must be front and center by fully participating in decision-making and implementation processes, preferably in a collaborative environment.

## Principle 3: Access to Protection

Students and educators will continue to face health and safety inequities in schools if they are not provided with proper PPE and disinfectants. Schools are collaborative spaces where materials are regularly shared and social distancing might not always be possible. To minimize exposure or infection from COVID-19, we must ensure that all students and educators have continuously funded access to PPE and other disinfecting supplies. Schools, many of which are already underfunded, should not be faced with the decision of how to pay for this equipment. Denying schools access and funding to PPE would exacerbate health and education inequities.



## Principle 4: Leading with Equity

Every student deserves to live and learn in a community with an accessible network of public infrastructure and opportunities designed to meet their needs. However, the NEA's 3 million members know that race, ZIP code, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, family status, employment status, and economic background impact a child's access to opportunity and success. Additionally, the negative impacts we continue to see are exacerbated for Indigenous, Black, and students of color. We understand how policymakers attempt to divide us by strengthening these networks in some of our communities and not in others. Members understand that the status of public education today is not an accident. As we begin to have discussions on how to move our schools beyond COVID-19, we must do so by creating policies that clearly articulate what each community needs to be able to achieve racial and social justice. We need to organize as a broad coalition to attack the interconnected systems that create the inequities in our schools.

## Future Forward

In contemplating what must be done in schools to safely reopen buildings, one thing is abundantly clear: There is a paramount need for the federal government to provide substantial support to education systems in order to safely and effectively deliver instruction. Our priorities as a nation must be reevaluated. Rather than bailing out massive corporations who have profited during the pandemic, we must support a system that works for all of our nation. School systems will not only need additional resources to reopen buildings safely, they also will need to make up for the economic fallout from the pandemic, which is expected to hollow out the state and local tax revenues that fund ordinary school operations. Under pandemic conditions, the need for additional federal measures to fund schools is nothing short of desperate.

Failure to invest in public schools and IHEs would exacerbate various problems that will prolong the current economic crisis, including increased class sizes, educator job losses, reduced resources and opportunities for student learning, and potential impacts on school infrastructure. The federal government must make massive federal appropriations earmarked for public schools and IHEs, and the Federal Reserve must be prepared to purchase bonds that would support states and school districts facing major budget deficits. Investing in public PreK-12 and higher education is critical to prepare our children for an increasingly uncertain economic future and give them the knowledge and critical thinking skills they will need to help secure our democracy.

---

**Investing in public  
PreK-12 and higher  
education is critical  
to prepare our  
children for an  
increasingly uncertain  
economic future.**

---

# II. PREPARING TO REOPEN SCHOOL BUILDINGS

## CRITICAL TOPICS FOR EDUCATORS TO RAISE IN PLANNING A RETURN TO SCHOOLS

### Learn from Spring 2020

*How should we assess the extent to which technological solutions implemented when school buildings closed were effective in meeting the needs of educators, students, and families and prepare to adapt those solutions in the next school year?*

The severity of the digital divide came under harsh light throughout much of the country as the scarcity of student access to devices and broadband Internet caused districts to scramble to provide distance learning programs to students. To avoid the potentially devastating effects that similar disruptions could have on student learning opportunities in the next school year, we must evaluate what was learned from Spring 2020 closures and identify specific actions that states, districts, and schools can take to avoid repeating history.

Districts, states, and the federal government must acknowledge that the pandemic was not experienced equally by all communities and populations, particularly in rural areas and communities of color. These systems must evaluate how different families handled the time out of school buildings.

1. Acknowledge the pandemic was not experienced equally by all communities and populations, particularly in rural areas and communities of color. Listen and learn how different families handled the time out of school buildings.

#### Items for Consideration:

- How can schools effectively evaluate and build learning that meets the needs of all students, including those whose learning may have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19?
- How can schools identify ongoing needs for social services, academic remediation, and the like?
- How can schools identify students without needed technology and student households that may need assistance?
- How can schools allocate funding and resources to help close opportunity gaps that have been exacerbated by the disparate impacts of school closures on households without Internet access, hardware, and other resources essential for student success?

#### Resource:

- Statewide Committee to Safely Reopen Florida's Public Schools: Priorities and Recommendations, by Florida Education Association. See *References*.





2. Evaluate the extent of disruptions to student learning due to resource shortages, including device shortages, lack of connectivity, lack of digital literacy, etc.
3. Recognize the extent of inadequate and inequitable distribution of student devices and examine the extent to which such inequities contribute to differing levels of student engagement with learning.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure that they are prepared and work with stakeholders to create distance learning transition plans that are consistent and equitable to avoid future episodes of crisis learning?
- What can schools do to secure and supply adaptive technologies to meet individual student needs, including assistive technology to support students who are English language learners or are differently abled?

4. Provide digital literacy instruction and ensure that informational resources on how to utilize online programs and school software systems are available in multiple languages and include adaptive technology.

**Items for Consideration:**

- To what extent were those solutions ineffective or inadequate?
- Which students were unable or unwilling to participate in online activities?

5. Prepare students and educators to switch or toggle back and forth from face-to-face instruction to online learning in the event of virus-related closures in the future.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can districts ensure access to technology and broadband Internet in consideration of Indigenous, Black, and students of color and under-resourced students and educators who do not otherwise have access to this technology or broadband?

## Ground Decisions in Science

*What information should be used to prepare to transition from social distancing to in-person instruction?*

Widespread increases in the capacities for COVID-19 testing and contact tracing are necessary preconditions for making informed decisions about reopening school buildings.

### Base Decisions on a Full Picture Informed by Evidence

*What public health measures must be in place to adequately conduct an assessment and make a determination regarding the reopening of school buildings?*

The importance of public health expertise and guidance cannot be overstated. All decisions to reopen school buildings must be based in scientific evidence and advice.

---

**All decisions to reopen school buildings must be based in scientific evidence and advice.**

---

### Testing and Contact Tracing

Testing capacity in the United States remains inadequate and uneven. This is especially true in under-resourced communities and communities of color—populations that have had the least access to adequate COVID-19 testing. To evaluate whether outbreaks are sufficiently contained to allow school buildings to reopen safely, the United States must have the ability to perform adequate testing.

However, the need for widespread testing is not a sufficient precondition for reopening school buildings and businesses in the absence of robust contact-tracing and case-isolation capacity. Before any decisions are made as to when and under what conditions school buildings can reopen, widespread contact-tracing and case-isolation measures must be in place, with the understanding that communities of color have been hit hardest by COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

**Item for Consideration:**

- How do we ensure that rural communities and communities of color gain access to public health services and virus testing?



## Outline and Communicate Science-Based Standards for Determining School Operating Status

*What information should schools rely on to determine whether and how to reopen school buildings?*

Public health experts know best the risks of reopening and how to ameliorate them.

### Conditions for Reopening Buildings

In the absence of federal guidance, it is incumbent on state and local governments to develop reopening criteria based on sound epidemiological science and public health principles. Once a state has sufficient testing as well as contact-tracing and case-isolation capabilities, responsible decisions can be made about the reopening of school buildings.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What data will be used, and how will they be analyzed to make any reopening decisions?
- Which epidemiologically relevant populations in the school district's community must be considered separately—considering all student and educator communities and varied student abilities—in making these decisions?

### Conditions for Reinstating School Closures

Establish and be transparent about the conditions under which schools would close again; not just the conditions under which they can open. Base school closure decisions on transparent data made known by clear standards; for example, transmission rate, number of cases in the school or community, and number of persons exposed on a particular school grounds.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What conditions will be set regarding physical building closures and how learning will continue?
- How will these conditions be communicated during closures so that people can be prepared?

<sup>1</sup>Rashawn Ray. [Why Are Blacks Dying at Higher Rates from COVID-19?](#) (Brookings). April 9, 2020. Additional coverage of this issue: Rodney A. Brooks. [African Americans Struggle with Disproportionate COVID Death Toll](#) (National Geographic). April 24, 2020. Shelby Lin Erdman. [Black Communities Account for Disproportionate Number of COVID-10 Deaths in the US, Study Finds](#) (CNN). May 6, 2020.

**Resource:**

- TSTA Standards for Safe Students, Schools, and Communities, by the Texas State Teachers Association. See *References*.

## Plan According to Specific Needs of PreK-12 Schools and IHEs

### *Why do school plans need to be more detailed than general public health guidelines suggest?*

The voices of educators who know their schools and students best are critical for creating effective plans for keeping students, educators, and communities safe and ensuring learning can occur.

### **Strategize Safe PreK-12 School Operations**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought national attention to problems that predate it, but they are not new to educators. Students whose families are in economic crisis, facing food insecurity, or homeless struggle to learn. Educators know that addressing these needs is—and must be treated as—an urgent priority as we plan for improving our schools and strengthening our communities.

Educators have seen complex plans developed by school administrators that break down the moment they come up against the humanity and complexity of our diverse student populations. Plans for safe and equitable learning environments must be developed by and with the educators who know their students and their needs best; educators who will be on the frontline administering the policies to ensure the safety of all on school grounds.



### **Tailor Safety Precautions for Higher Education**

As IHEs decide how and when to reopen in the next school year and offer in-person classes, student services, and on-campus housing, colleges and universities must plan for ongoing virus prevention. These plans must include how to safely situate students in residence halls: They must provide single rooms as much as possible or create plans for “pods” and “quads,” where students who have tested negatively and have been appropriately quarantined can be grouped together for their time on campus to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. IHEs also must consider unorthodox teaching practices for the safety of faculty as well as the safety of students at residential campuses and commuter campuses, such as community colleges. IHEs should consider teaching in large lecture spaces or other open areas where students are able to social distance easily and safely. When that is not possible, IHEs must consider having faculty come to the dorms or other low-foot-traffic areas to keep students as stationary as possible.

Institutions also must keep campus ESPs, including custodial staff, healthy by providing them appropriate and proper PPE equipment to maintain safety on campus where students, faculty, and other staff will meet. This also means that colleges and universities must consider safety plans should cases arise during the semester that include temperature checks and spaces for quarantined students who have been affected while on campus.

As IHEs consider these plans for reopening campuses safely, decisions must be accompanied by clear and daily communication plans to faculty, staff, students, and their families so that all stakeholders have the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19 on campus. These plans must address the unique challenges of each type of IHE, including those located in urban and rural areas, HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other MSIs as well as traditional and commuter campuses.

**Resource:**

- UFF/FEA Higher Education Reopening Committee Guidelines: Priorities and Recommendations, by United Faculty of Florida and Florida Education Association. See *References*.

## School Campuses Are Hubs for the Community

*Why are detailed and rigorous protocols needed that drill down farther than what the federal government has provided?*

Given the conditions of human interaction on school campuses—which is different than shopping in a grocery store or boutique—it is necessary for school systems to establish and adhere to rigorous protocols for the safe operation of schools. Such protocols must be far more detailed and rigorous than what the federal government has thus set forth.

Districts must create protocols for safe reopening of school buildings in partnership with educators and other education stakeholders. Local association leaders should consider holding an issue identification campaign as a way to support district planning.

1. Create protocols for safe reopening of school buildings in partnership with educators and other education stakeholders.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure that the voices of members are reflected in priorities outlined by local association leaders so that they are authentically representative of the concerns and needs of members?
2. Ensure that school building reopening plans are inclusive and equitable for all educators and students by humanizing learning environments and designing spaces that are situated in the experiences of communities of color, not just through White, cis-hetero, and able-bodied lenses.

**Resource:**

- Racial Justice in Education Framework, by NEA Center for Social Justice. See *References*.
3. Embed housing, food, health, dental, and job services in neighborhood schools because it is a common-sense and proven way to begin to address these issues and the racial inequities they create and exacerbate.

**Item for Consideration:**

- In what ways should we shift our usual choices and decision-making to address racial, social, and economic justice during conversations about rebuilding and recovery?

---

**In what ways should we shift our usual choices and decision-making to address racial, social, and economic justice during conversations about rebuilding and recovery?**

---

## Educators at the Forefront in Responding to Crisis

### *Why is educator voice more important now than ever?*

Educator voice must saturate every level of decision-making and be authentically embedded into processes and policies that will guide decision-making throughout this emergency and in the future. Educators must be considered a permanent stakeholder in figuring out solutions that ensure our students continue to learn and thrive no matter what the challenge. Educator voice is critical because many educators place equity at the forefront and champion racial and social justice.

For schools to be successful, policymakers must invest not only in education but also in addressing issues surrounding education: mortgage and rent cancellation for families in economic crisis; school-based community food programs; increased local hiring to provide jobs for unemployed adults; home broadband Internet and computer device access for all individuals; and a more robust public health infrastructure that includes programs like basic health screenings and widespread access to community-based mental health services.

### **Ensure the Meaningful Engagement of ESPs**

#### *What important perspective and skills do education support professionals bring to school campuses, and how might they contribute to school buildings reopening?*

ESPs must be consulted and given the opportunity to collaborate on establishing policies and procedures for keeping schools safe. The on-the-ground needs observed by those staff members should be understood and acted upon by school leaders.

ESPs often have the language skills to most effectively communicate with English language learners and their families. They also are more likely to live in the community served by the school in which they work. Without these language skills, home/school communication would be difficult or impossible and diverse cultural norms would not be accommodated in school planning. It is the position of the NEA that school district and school site-level plans must always be developed in a manner that ensures the involvement and partnership of educators, and especially ESPs.



#### **Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools act to provide safe conditions and protect workers from serious hazards, especially knowing that the workforce in education support positions consists of many educators of color?
- How can schools take action to ensure the safety of educators who lack work-site protections to prevent workers of color from being disproportionately affected and facing excessive risks to their health and safety?



### **Collaborate with School and District Leaders in Critical Decisions About Learning Expectations and How to Help Educators Succeed**

*How can educators contribute to creating feasible, effective, and safe programs for school building reopening that will facilitate student learning and uplift educational opportunities for all students?*

Educators must be given meaningful opportunities to collaborate with decision-makers and provided greater autonomy to innovate under challenging and changing conditions. Educators practice a complex craft and their understanding of how to deliver curriculum and build student social and critical thinking skills must be honored and respected.

#### **Items for Consideration:**

- How can districts solicit educator feedback on plans for reopening school buildings and collaborate with educators to plan pre-opening planning days, activities, and opportunities to practice new protocols?
- How can districts be genuine in engaging educators in making plans and decisions about reopening and/or closing school buildings?
- How can districts be timely and responsive to addressing all educator concerns about health, safety, wellness, and teaching?
- How will educators be consulted and considered partners in deciding on policies and expectations regarding curriculum, grades, attendance, and student progress?
- Since school leaders succeed when they foster collaborative environments, how will educators be given time and space within professional learning communities to learn from one another and implement best practices?
- How will schools provide educators with the time and staffing required to build and deepen relationships with students' families? (Examples include manageable caseloads for special educators; educator-led programs; paid parent home visits; reimagined school conferences; and shared decision-making around school climate issues.)

### **Charge Educators to Lead in Ensuring That Schools Support All Students**

*How can educators disrupt inequity, racism, and stereotyping? What experiences are unique to educators that can guide the creation of systems and opportunities that will help ensure opportunities for all students through this chapter in history and beyond?*

Educators must be given time to develop new lessons that incorporate the science and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, educators will serve a critical public health role in the nation's recovery. Schools must ensure that adequate time is provided for classroom community-building activities and should consider providing the paid time and additional staff to allow for the development of restorative practices in schools.



Educators—if provided with the staffing, space, and time—can help build diverse, representative environments in our schools that can serve as a model for our society’s future as we recover from this crisis. By valuing the voices of students and emphasizing the importance of relationships in the school community, these structures are inherently antiracist and democratic. They are essential at a time when political leaders and mass media increasingly dehumanize groups through lies and divisive rhetoric.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can educators help ensure that other stakeholders, including families, are consulted when creating plans for reopening school buildings?
- How can educators fight misinformation and protect vulnerable students from coronavirus racism?
- How can educators modify practices of student assessment to make sure they are checking in with students emotionally and socially before addressing academic strengths and challenges?
- How can existing school climate surveys and feedback mechanisms be modified to include additional sections on COVID-19-related changes to schools and instructional systems so that students, families, and staff can evaluate and weigh in on the efficacy, fairness, and consequences of those changes?

**Resource:**

- Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together, by Dr. David E. Kirkland, Executive Director of the NYU Steinhardt Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. See *References*.

## Implement a Detailed Plan for Reopening School Buildings

*How should schools and IHEs make the operational changes necessary for reopening school buildings and campuses safely?*

A plan for reopening school buildings and campuses must take the following into account: the preparations, including changes to physical structures, that must be completed prior to students reentering schools; the preparations and training that educators must receive and implement prior to welcoming students back to school; the ongoing strategies and policies that must be diligently adhered to in order to keep staff and students safe; and the preparations and accommodations for potential school closures and extended student and staff absences.

For these plans to be successful, they must be grounded in sound scientific guidance and incorporate input from educators who know students best and will be expected to carry out new procedures on school campuses. Educators should be authentically engaged in the school building reopening process and serve as standing members of any planning committees or similar caucuses that will make critical decisions about school operations.

### Prepare School Facilities

*How should schools prepare school buildings for the reentry of students and staff on school grounds and their necessary movement throughout the day?*

1. All school facilities and equipment must undergo a deep cleaning using CDC-approved disinfectants, such as bleach solutions or alcohol.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure the education support professionals who are responsible for cleaning the buildings will receive sufficient training and PPE to safely and effectively carry out disinfection procedures?

2. Prepare vehicles used for transporting students by cleaning the interior and exterior with CDC-approved disinfectants and ensure ample supplies for routine and continuous cleaning after trips and at the end of the school day. Prior to being placed into circulation, all student transportation vehicles must be deep cleaned and disinfected, with particular attention to high-touch surfaces, such as door handles and grab bars.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What logistics are involved with safe school transportation?
- How will the district decrease the number of students on school buses or limit students' use of public transit in communities that rely most heavily on these modes of transportation?
- Are there enough bus drivers to meet the need if the school district holds multiple school sessions for different sets of students during the day, necessitating additional bus routes?



3. Provide secure, separate storage for students' outerwear and other belongings.
4. Reduce and rearrange furniture in classrooms, dining areas, break rooms, and other areas to accommodate six feet of physical separation between and among students and staff. (See *Establish Social Distancing Measures* for additional information).

**Items for Consideration:**

- How might large school spaces be used to support learning and ensure compliance with social distancing requirements?
- How might schools incorporate the use of existing outdoor spaces for student learning and activities? What happens during inclement weather when those spaces are unavailable?



5. Install floor markings, signage, and other implements as necessary to designate single points of entry and exit as well as regulate and direct foot traffic to help people maintain physical distance entering and exiting school grounds and navigating school buildings. (See *Establish Social Distancing Measures* for additional information.)

6. Install physical barriers and signage and clearly publicize policies as needed to stop students from gathering in large groups before, during, and after the school day. (See *Establish Social Distancing Measures* for additional information.)

**Items for Consideration:**

- What are the times of day when students typically congregate, and what changes are necessary to prevent it?
- What changes to schools need to be made to minimize the number of students together in common spaces?

7. Install handwashing stations or hand sanitizing stations at school and campus entrances and exits and throughout school grounds as necessary to facilitate handwashing by students and staff throughout the day. (See *Establish and Oversee Safe Hygiene Practices* for additional details).

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure hand sanitizing and handwashing stations are used throughout the day? Consider installing hand sanitizer in every classroom and area that is in use by students and staff.
- Can the school provide sufficient soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content, and face masks to students, faculty, and staff?
- How can schools provide sufficient space and materials like trash bins and other receptacles for the hygienic disposal of biohazardous materials and single-use materials, such as masks, gloves, and paper towels?



8. Designate and prepare a compliant space for conducting in-person parent and guardian visits with students and staff members, such as individualized education plan (IEP) conferences.
9. Designate and prepare at least one isolation room for any student or staff member who shows symptoms associated with COVID-19. (See *Establish and Oversee Safe Hygiene Practices* for additional details.)

## Prepare School Staff

### *How should staff prepare to make operational changes necessary and prepare to welcome students back to school buildings?*

To maintain compliance with protocols and ensure student learning occurs with the least disruptions and fewest risks to students and staff, schools must ensure sufficient staffing to meet operational and instructional needs.

1. Practice and prepare to model proper hygiene practices such as handwashing, using hand sanitizer, and social distancing techniques, including alternatives to handshakes.
2. Practice and prepare to model the proper wearing and disposal of PPE, including masks.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools disseminate instructions for proper mask etiquette prior to reentering schools and campuses so that everyone sees it?

- Should the school or district develop a mask policy? How can they ensure adherence to these mask policies?
- How can schools utilize digital learning platforms and traditional and social media to conduct trainings for families on proper use of PPE before the start of school?
- How can schools make information available to all families, regardless of Internet access or language, in the community about returning to school safely?



3. Train staff in trauma-informed practices to strengthen the trauma-informed culture for students. Prepare to communicate effectively and empathetically with students about the pandemic and about the necessary changes to school life. It has been well documented that COVID-19 risks and impacts are disproportionately concentrated in America's communities of color, including medical risk factors, job losses, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and mortality rates.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How might schools work with educators, including SISP, to organize and focus on mental and emotional supports at school for students and educators to grieve, heal, reconnect, and strengthen the in-school community before the focus on instruction begins?
  - What school-based mental and emotional health screening and supports are essential for stabilizing communities?
4. Ensure sufficient staffing of SISP—such as school social workers, school counselors, and campus support staff—to provide the support for critical family and student mental health and behavioral needs at school.
  5. Ensure sufficient staffing of ESPs—including paraeducators and those who carry out custodial and maintenance services, food services, and transportation services—as well as SISP, such as health and student services staff (for example, licensed school nurses and nursing assistant staff) to make sure hygienic practices can be properly implemented and sustained.
  6. Prepare staff to help students adapt to restrictions on their movements and activities. Prepare and implement ways to make students feel comfortable on campus and easily identify educators and other staff. For example, educators might wear a name badge that features a photograph of them without a mask.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools help students—especially students new to the school—feel comfortable and alleviate their fears?
7. Prepare staff for what to do if various exigencies occur (for example, a student experiences a medical emergency while on campus; a student is insubordinate regarding hygienic procedures; a case of on-campus violence; etc.)
  8. Monitor designated areas at school entry and exit times and during breaks or class changes to help monitor and facilitate the flow and regulation of student traffic. (See *Establish Social Distancing Measures* for additional information.)



## Establish Social Distancing Measures

*What social distancing measures are necessary to operate schools safely during the pandemic, and what changes should we expect to our campuses, classrooms, and school grounds?*

1. Maintain six feet of separation between and among students and staff members in classrooms, hallways, and exterior school grounds.

### Item for Consideration

- What are the procedures for sanitizing handles/rails, equipment, and restroom facilities throughout the day to avoid learning disruptions?

2. Reduce class sizes as needed and maintain adequate staffing levels for teaching and learning to occur in a safe and equitable manner, with students seated six feet apart from one another and at least six feet from where teaching staff are stationed.

### Item for Consideration

- How might in-class practices, such as assigned seating, help minimize danger to students?

3. Minimize mixing and intermingling of class groups to the extent possible and keep clusters together and in the same classroom as much as possible for the duration of the school day.

### Items for Consideration

- Should instructors and/or staff move rather than students to minimize circulation of students throughout school buildings?
- Should schools hire additional before- and after-school care staff to ensure that students are safely distanced throughout the school building and not grouped in a centralized location?



4. Restructure student meals to avoid communal stacks or bins of trays, cups, and serving ware. Provide individually plated meals that students can receive and eat in their assigned learning areas, rather than a dining hall. Ensure that the implementation of any plans consider the racial history of students to avoid practices that feel inequitable, unjust, and discriminatory to the student.

### Item for Consideration

- If use of a dining hall is unavoidable, are lunch shifts a viable option for allowing students to maintain distance in serving lines and seating areas?

5. Adjust school schedules as needed to accommodate social distancing protocols, such as staggering or alternative in-person instructional days and combining with distance learning.

### Items for Consideration

- If staggered or alternative schedules are used, will educators' roles be tailored so that some are assigned to virtual environments while others are assigned to in-person classroom environments?
- How will privacy and Internet security concerns be addressed in relation to distance learning?

- Adjust or cancel assemblies, field trips, interscholastic events, communal play, extracurricular activities, and any other activities to be in compliance with the current guidance from health experts. Those activities that cannot be adjusted accordingly must be canceled. Prevent any sharing of school supplies, including books, electronic devices, toys, musical instruments, and the like.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can students receive a well-rounded program of instruction—including fine arts, music, and extracurricular activities—despite new school protocols?
- Are there enough supplies to consider letting students “check out” or take materials, including art supplies, calculators, musical instruments, toys, etc. that will no longer be in use in school buildings to supplement learning at home, avoid learning disruptions in the event of school closures, and ensure the success of distance learning programs?
- How can performing arts, physical education, fine arts, and other activities be effectively modified?
- How can schools incorporate student movement at regular intervals throughout the school day to promote student health and wellness?

**Resource:**

- Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together, by Dr. David E. Kirkland, Executive Director of the NYU Steinhardt Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. See *References*.

- Restrict school entry to asymptomatic staff, students, and essential visitors, such as delivery, medical, and public safety personnel. Limit parent/guardian visits to scheduled or emergency situations.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure there are no disincentives for school staff and students with symptoms to stay home, such as awards or prizes for perfect attendance?

## Establish and Oversee Safe Hygiene Practices

*What hygienic practices should staff and students be prepared for and what kinds of PPE should be used to ensure the safe operation of schools?*

- Require faculty, staff, and students to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water upon entering and leaving school grounds; when changing tasks, such as changing classrooms or after recess periods; before and after meals; and throughout the workday.
- Require all staff and students to wear masks of sufficient quality throughout the school day, except during meals. Schools must supply masks made of at least two-ply cotton to staff who are not carrying out disinfection procedures—which require greater protection—and students, in accordance with CDC recommendations.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19*. April 13, 2020.

3. Ensure that staff involved in preparing and serving meals and custodial staff are supplied with and wear appropriate protective gear, including N95 masks and gloves; this includes staff involved in student transport and cleaning vehicles used for student and/or staff transport.

**Items for Consideration:**

- Is there sufficient PPE to make sure educators stay safe, particularly ESPs?
  - How will we meet the needs to clean and sanitize schools without overburdening school janitorial staff?
  - How will school materials that must be shared be disinfected for use among students and staff?
  - How will requiring educators to wear masks, if mandated, impact students' ability to hear and understand instruction, particularly for early readers and some students with disabilities?
4. Provide continuous reinforcement of hygienic practices and procedures through staff modeling and other methods.

### **Work with Educators to Prepare Contingencies in the Event of Rolling School Building Closures**

*How can schools prepare educators and students to be able to continue learning in the event there are temporary or prolonged school closures in Fall 2020 or some people cannot return to school buildings?*

In Spring 2020, many state and local educational agencies tried to implement online learning programs so that students could continue learning throughout school closures. Some of these programs included device distribution and facilitated broadband Internet access, but by and large, inequitable access to sufficient devices and connectivity proved to be a monumental challenge to effective online learning.

Education technology is a tool to enhance and enrich instruction for students and should not be used to replace or limit educational employees who work with students. Technology in schools must always be a tool wielded by trained education professionals to augment the student learning experience and create skills for digital literacy. They can never serve as a replacement for the human component that is the essence of real education.

1. Provide access to broadband Internet in all student homes and 1:1 devices for all students at no cost.
2. Ensure distance learning lessons do not require access to a printer. Conduct distance learning equitably so that it can be a feasible ongoing solution to learning through the pandemic.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What resources and supports are needed so that all students can learn successfully?
- How might educators' strengths and staff schedules be adjusted so that all educators can be successful?



- Do adjustments need to be made to the school calendar?
- What is the feasibility of split scheduling?
- What additional on-grounds spaces (mobile classrooms, etc.) are needed?

## **Establish Systems for Effective Communication with the School Community**

*How should schools communicate with and prepare their communities/students and families to return to school?*

Schools should engage educators and other education stakeholders in informing the school community of new policies ahead of time and implement protocols for clearly communicating school operating statuses and public health updates.

### **Involve Stakeholders in the Planning Process**

1. Establish a committee of all school and community stakeholders to conduct a needs and assets assessment for each school community.
2. Include educator, parent, student, and community voices in the assessment process to understand the needs and assets related to academics, physical and mental health, and socioeconomic conditions.

#### **Item for Consideration:**

- As trusted members of the community, what is the potential role of educators in bringing together families and the community to make sure all voices are heard?

### **Practice Before Full Implementation**

1. Conduct pre-opening practice days for groups of students to acquaint themselves with new rules and procedures.
2. Post signs and placards in various languages.
3. Make sure sanitation products and practices are accessible to all students, including those with physical disabilities.
4. Prepare to accommodate students with disabilities, including students who may be nonverbal, so they are safe from harm.
5. Educate families and students in varied formats and languages on how to practice safety and social distancing in communities when walking or taking public transportation to school.
6. Implement best practices learned from Spring 2020 school closures.
7. Prevent inequitable access to continuous instruction by ensuring that all students have the requisite hardware, software, and connectivity to be successful.



# III. HELPING SCHOOLS SUCCEED DURING COVID-19

## GUIDANCE FOR ENSURING LEARNING CONTINUES AMID ONGOING EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

### Create School Health Protocols

*What should schools do to ensure the continuation of learning and keep schools open once they welcome students back?*

Before school buildings physically open in the next school year, decision-makers need to ensure that all schools have protocols to maintain the safety of students and educators. Schools must consider how to conduct ongoing disease prevention and mitigation, including testing, tracing, and isolating new cases in a way that does not promote racial and social injustice and inequity.

### Implement Daily Monitoring Practices

*What steps can schools take to monitor the wellness of school and campus populations?*

Schools must establish and administer clear plans for how to monitor students and staff for symptoms and handle suspected cases of COVID-19 during the school day. The school community must be informed of these practices so that family members and others can be prepared to follow protocols, such as picking up a symptomatic student from school and isolating students who have come in contact with or are suspected to have come in contact with a person who has COVID-19.

1. Institute procedures for screening and monitoring students and staff for symptoms, including daily temperature checks and symptom inquiries upon entry to school grounds.

**Item for Consideration:**

- Will it be possible for schools and IHEs—including community schools and early childhood programs—that normally provide routine health screenings to continue such practices or should they be temporarily suspended depending on a school's structural and staff capacity?



2. Require staff to practice and model ongoing hygienic protocols for students. Monitor students and staff for compliance.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools promote compliance with hygienic practices and social distancing protocols through a sense of community responsibility rather than through punitive measures?
- How can schools ensure health protocols are implemented in a way that promotes racial and social justice?



3. Implement social distancing measures, including procedures for moving students or staff who begin to show COVID-19 symptoms to a dedicated isolation area while at school. (See *II. Preparing to Reopen School Buildings* for additional information.)

**Item for Consideration:**

- How will the school system communicate with families about students who have had contact with confirmed cases?

4. Provide hygienic equipment and PPE, and maintain handwashing requirements for staff and students.

5. Disinfect and sanitize frequently. School buildings should be cleaned throughout the day and sanitized according to CDC guidelines using approved disinfectants, such as bleach solutions, after the end of the school day. Vehicles used for transporting students must be cleaned on the interior and exterior after every trip and must be thoroughly cleaned after the end of the school day.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools complete cleaning procedures during the day without disrupting student learning or endangering student and staff safety?



## Protect Staff and Students at a Higher Risk from COVID-19

*What special accommodations should schools adopt for the protection of staff members and students who are medically fragile?*

Staff members and students who have underlying conditions or risk factors identified by the CDC should be provided with opportunities to continue learning while still putting their health and safety first.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What special accommodations should be extended to students and staff that come into frequent contact with individuals who are at a higher risk of COVID-19?
- What distance learning opportunities and resources might be provided to students who are members of at-risk populations to ensure education equity?
- What accommodations—for example, remote work—might a school provide to an at-risk staff member?

## Keep the Community Informed

*What do staff, students, and families need to know about the status of school operations and what disclosures should be made to the school community?*

Schools must work with public health and state and local government officials to establish and communicate clear criteria for determining the operating status of schools.

1. Establish science-based determinative criteria and include factors such as the transmission rate of the virus, number of cases in the school or community, number of persons exposed on school and IHE campuses, among others.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What impact will school building closures have on the community, and what impact will community policies have on making decisions regarding school building closures?
  - How will school closure conditions be monitored and who will make the final decision?
2. Make public guidelines for conditions under which school operating statuses are determined, and ensure the community has convenient access to updates and information about school building and campus reopening and closures.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How will resources be made available in languages spoken in the community and in formats that can be accessed by all students (for example, mass texts, website updates, radio announcements, television announcements)?
3. Collaborate with educators to continuously communicate with and solicit feedback from stakeholders including school staff, students, and families as well as other individuals as deemed appropriate regarding school operations processes.

**Item for Consideration:**

- How can schools avoid a culture of stigma or judgment and protect privacy while encouraging families to be honest and accountable regarding keeping sick or exposed students at home and reporting confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases in their households?

## Be Responsive to the Needs of Students and the School Community

*How can schools conduct ongoing disease prevention and mitigation, including testing, tracing, and isolating new cases, in a way that does not promote racial and social injustice and inequity?*

Implement clear policies on how to handle suspected cases of COVID-19 during the school day. If a student registers a high temperature or reports the primary symptoms of COVID-19, the school should isolate the student and contact a parent or guardian to take the student home. Staff members who register high temperatures or who report COVID-19 symptoms should be sent home. Those who are sent home due to symptoms should not return to school until they have been tested for COVID-19 and given a negative result. Additionally, siblings of students who test positive for COVID-19 should self-quarantine at home for two weeks and must test negative before returning to school. Students who have recovered from COVID-19 should also be monitored for the life-threatening post-COVID-19 inflammatory syndrome and asked about whether they have stomach pain or a rash.

Schools should create contingency plans to continue educational services for those students who are quarantining. It is likely that even with school buildings open, some students will need distance learning opportunities.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How will students who are quarantined receive education?
- Are the expectations and procedures for students reasonable?



- What are additional options that a school could use to equitably educate all students when a school building is operating at a reduced capacity?
- Will a school nurse be available for non-COVID-19 health issues during the school day?

### **Prioritize Mental Health and Social and Emotional Supports for Students and Staff**

*What kind of supports will students and staff need to be able to overcome the uncertainty and anxiety from COVID-19 and reengage in learning?*

1. Provide mental and emotional supports at school, which are essential measures for stabilizing communities.
2. Consider suspending academic instructional activity for two weeks to start school with a focus on social-emotional learning activities that includes trauma screening and supports to help students and adults deal with grief, loss, etc. Social-emotional supports should then be continued throughout the school year and be integrated into students' regular learning opportunities.

#### **Items for Consideration:**

- How might staff benefit from a mental wellness and self-care program that continues throughout the year to help avoid burnout and vicarious trauma?
  - How will educators be trained to identify students struggling with trauma and ensure they receive support?
  - How will mental health supports be made available to students who are struggling due to COVID-19 and its public health response?
  - What will trauma-informed school culture look like in each school building?
  - What additional supports might educators need to be able to work, given their own mental health stemming from COVID-19-related challenges?
  - How can schools provide or connect their educators to wraparound supports that will in turn enable them to meet student and family needs?
  - How do we promote and include self-care for educators as integrated into a school culture?
3. Ensure all students feel welcomed and have a place at schools and campuses.
  4. Work to foster a sense of community in our schools with all students and families. Provide additional supports for students and others who may feel vulnerable returning to school, including, but not limited to, Asian American and Pacific Islander students who have faced COVID-19-related xenophobia, students experiencing homelessness, and under-resourced students who feel stigmatized for not having resources in digital-learning-focused schools.
  5. Offer additional supports, such as group counseling, adult mentors, or referrals to community organizations that offer social services. Many LGBTQ+ students do not feel emotionally safe at home, and isolation can be particularly damaging. Thus, educators are uniquely positioned to provide support and resources to LGBTQ+ students during this time.



**Items for Consideration:**

- How will schools maintain and support individual relationships and a sense of connectedness with the racially and socially diverse families they serve?
  - How can we create an environment so that all students—including Indigenous, Black, and students of color—feel safe at school while implementing pandemic response measures?
  - What mechanisms can be put into place that respect safety and health but do not perpetuate racial injustice and the school-to-prison pipeline?
  - How can schools ensure support for students who feel safer at school than at home?
6. Engage student voices in designing their own support systems. As educators, our work must promote and support the engagement of students from historically marginalized backgrounds in shaping policies that directly impact their educational experience, which includes safe and inclusive schools. Social emotional learning needs, including self-care and trauma-informed practices, need to be fully integrated into the curriculum.

**Resource:**

- Platform for the Schools Our Students Deserve Post COVID, by the Colorado Education Association. See *References*.

**Meet the Needs of Students and Families by Providing Wraparound Supports**

*What kinds of compassionate instructional and wraparound supports and flexibility are needed to continue supporting students and families throughout COVID-19?*

1. Establish a committee of all school and community stakeholders to conduct a needs and assets assessment for each school community. This should include educator, parent, student, and community voices in the assessment process to understand the needs and assets related to academics, physical and mental health, and socioeconomic conditions.
2. Continue to provide meals to all families, even for those students who are not at school.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How will families' food needs be met?
- How can the food services effectively switch between in-school and remote meals, or provide both simultaneously?
- How can community partnerships be leveraged to ensure food security for students and families?

**Ensure Students Have What They Need to Be Successful**

*How can schools meet the academic needs of diverse populations of students?*

1. Maintain high standards for all students. The education offered by school systems during the pandemic was never intended to replace the experiences children would



have received in classrooms. It is a set of stopgap measures to help continue to offer educational enrichment to students and their families, but it is far from the level of quality that children deserve.

**Items for Consideration:**

- Will students be grouped by ability or need to make differentiation easier, or will that resegment schools at the classroom level in ways that are more harmful than helpful to Indigenous, Black, and students of color?
  - What are the best ways to manage content knowledge when some students are engaging in distance learning while others are learning at school?
  - Which teaching methods lend themselves best to remote instruction, and which are best suited for the classroom?
  - What are the best ways to lead project-based learning and other collaborative teaching methods while maintaining social distancing?
2. Differentiate for student learning needs. The pandemic was not experienced equally by different populations of students, and this will undoubtedly manifest itself in students' academic progress. There were gross inequities in the distance learning experiences of children around the country. Students will arrive at schools next year having had varied learning and enrichment opportunities since the beginning of school closures.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How will students' academic needs be diagnosed and remediated?
  - How will teaching be differentiated without exacerbating racial and social inequities?
3. Clearly communicate responsibilities and expectations to students. Students should not be punished for work they weren't able to complete or access due to the pandemic. Schools should clearly explain health protocols and expectations to students.

**Items for Consideration:**

- What modifications need to be made regarding technology platforms and norms when school buildings reopen?
- What will students be expected to do with their devices?
- Will students need to wear face masks? Who will provide them?

## **Provide Necessary Supports and Services to Students with Disabilities**

*How can schools maintain the involvement of parents and families and ensure schools can meet the social, emotional, and academic development needs of students with disabilities?*

The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) ensures special education and related services to 7 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and students with disabilities, and it has remained intact with no waivers throughout COVID-19. Therefore, throughout COVID-19 disruptions, school districts must continue to guarantee a free and appropriate public education and the procedural safeguards that protect students with disabilities by providing services to those students as driven by their IEP.



As schools will be forced to rely more on distance learning methodologies, the civil rights protections of the IDEA must remain intact while still allowing educators the flexibilities they need. Schools should collaborate with parents, students, and educators in addressing the use of instructional packets, distance learning, tele-therapy, and alternative settings and options as mechanisms to assist in IEP implementation and evaluation. The health and safety of our students, educators, and SISPs must remain a top priority.



The involvement of parent and kinship caregivers is critical to ensuring student success and maintaining the IEP intent and integrity. They are crucial members of the multidisciplinary-school-based IEP team who know the student best, and this team is equipped to make all social, emotional, and academic development decisions. This team is also the group of decision-makers who should lead the conversations on the need for any possible compensatory services and/or extended school year services upon the reopening of school buildings. Schools must also remember to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which “prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities that receive federal funding” and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. They must ensure equal access for all in every school.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can schools ensure students with disabilities are served throughout COVID-19, whether through distance learning or in the classroom?
- How can schools ensure sufficient staffing to maintain appropriate caseloads and meet compliance deadlines for students with disabilities?
- What can schools do to ensure student access to the SISP that they need for equitable instruction?
- How will schools ensure that student IEP teams are still able to meet in a virtual environment to decide how to best serve students with disabilities?
- What measures will schools implement to ensure compliance with IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act?



**Resource:**

- [Specialized Instructional Support Personnel](#), NEA website.

## Support Educator Success

*How can we ensure the professional growth and flexibility for innovation of a stable and diverse team of educators?*

### Promote Professional Learning and Innovation

*How can we promote educator success from supporting professional growth and innovation to maintaining a full and diverse team of educators?*

1. Uplift educators' strengths, allow specialization, and embrace ongoing professional learning. Afford opportunities for educators to disseminate and learn best practices and innovative ideas with one another. At the beginning of the school year, certification rules should be relaxed to accommodate those educators just coming out of teacher preparation.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How will educators' professional learning and collaboration time be structured?
  - What opportunities will exist for educators to collaborate and engage in professional learning to prepare for potential returns to distance learning?
2. Provide professional development for differentiated needs. Professional learning for staff must be differentiated to ensure that educators are able to learn the skills they need to be successful. These opportunities should address currently relevant topics—for example, updates on policies and procedures; using web 2.0 tools in teaching; online classroom management; trauma-informed distance learning; and mandatory reporting requirements. Provide teacher-led, immediately relevant, and differentiated professional learning.

**Some of the needs that should be addressed include:**

- a. Assisting educators who are struggling to make the transition to using technology;
- b. Providing opportunities for beginning and experienced educators to receive mentoring from educators with skills such as those most needed for providing effective online instruction;
- c. Identifying alternative means to measure student learning—for example, training educators on how to write valid assessments; and
- d. Working with educators to identify multiple ways to implement professional learning goals and training as well as meet teacher evaluation requirements.

**Items for Consideration:**

- How can professional learning for staff be differentiated as they potentially navigate unique and unfamiliar ways of teaching?
  - How can districts and schools ensure that educators have timely access to student performance data so that they can track student progress and effectively differentiate instruction for students?
  - Will educators be expected to simultaneously teach face-to-face and virtually, or split their time between the two?
  - Will some educators be assigned to virtual environments while others are assigned to classroom environments?
  - How can districts and schools tailor assignments to uplift and encourage the professional skills and growth of each individual educator?
3. Support educator creativity and innovation. Allow educators flexibility to think creatively and apply learning effectively in supporting students' needs. Think beyond what always "has been," and think about how schooling may need to be different.

## Plan for Educator Recruitment, Certification, and Retention

Recruit new public school staff in spite of the crisis. As the Colorado Education Association's plan poignantly notes, "A stable, fairly compensated education workforce is key to providing students much-needed stability." By involving the larger community in the business of school systems, schools and districts will be better equipped to identify individuals who may make good candidates from within the community. Build programs that allow educators to serve in a paraprofessional and/or residency role as they learn to become teachers; evidence suggests that teachers who come from the communities in which they live are often more diverse and more likely to remain in the profession. Build partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs to target individuals for preparation. Support new educators who might be facing licensure challenges as a result of school closures that impacted student teaching requirements and those teaching on provisional licenses.

Consider the staffing needs to support all students while maintaining social distancing. Many schools may need an increased number of teachers and ESP positions, including custodial staff and bus drivers. There will also be a need for additional specialized instructional support personnel, such as school counselors and school social workers to meet students' behavioral and social-emotional needs. Ensure the availability of a cadre of qualified substitute teachers ready to work should educators get sick or need to self-quarantine.

### Items for Consideration:

- How can hiring be conducted in a virtual environment?
- How will districts conduct the onboarding process for new employees?
- How will recruitment policies and procedures support the hiring of a diverse workforce?

### Resource:

- Platform for the Schools Our Students Deserve Post COVID, by the Colorado Education Association. See *References*.

## Suspend High Stakes Educator Evaluations

*How can educator evaluations provide helpful feedback on professional performance and guide them in identifying needed learning?*

High stakes evaluations should be suspended until after the crisis has passed. Evaluations during the crisis should be formative and used to help improve their pedagogy or the services they provide.

### Items for Consideration:

- For educators who will be teaching with the use of recording devices or live streaming instruction, how can schools ensure that the privacy rights of both students and educators are protected?
- How can educators receive constructive feedback on their effectiveness at this time?
- Will formal evaluations be put on hold?

## IV. FUTURE FORWARD

### HOW CAN WE TAKE THE LESSONS OF THIS TIME AND USE THEM TO RE-ENVISION SCHOOLS, NOT AS THEY ONCE WERE BUT INSTEAD AS THEY CAN BE?

The choices we make now and in the months to come can systematically transform our nation's schools into the shining cornerstones of democracy we have long envisioned. We know we must refuse to "return to normal." As we move forward, we should take advantage of the opportunity to make changes to the education system. Just as above, this transformation should continue to consider the same four basic principles: prioritizing health and safety of all, respecting educator voice and expertise, having access to protection, and leading with equity.

#### Health Expertise

We need effective systems for making policies that protect those in our public PreK-12 schools and IHEs. We need to make sure that schools can quickly and effectively respond to any challenge. Crisis response should not be carried out at the expense of any school, any educator, or any child. Moving forward, we must insist on policies that ensure a safe working environment for educators and a safe learning environment for students.

We owe it to our students to identify and understand how trauma—both related to the pandemic and not—has adversely affected their lives. We can expand and strengthen the mental and emotional health supports that children and families need to be able to learn. This starts by ensuring that every school has full-time counselors and social workers. It also entails changing cultural norms and education policies that emphasize test-driven outcomes at the expense of wellness.

#### Educator Voice

We can improve the professional respect given to educators and establish norms that set educators up for success. Put simply, educator voice must saturate every level of decision-making and be authentically embedded into processes and policies that will guide decision-making now and in the future.

We should support the continuous learning of educators through different configurations of schools, such as resident programs, professional development schools, community schools, and mentoring programs. We should also seriously consider implementing certain teaching and learning innovations—such as looping, flipped classrooms, and project-based instruction—on a larger scale.

In doing so, schools might consider establishing, supporting, and maintaining labor management collaboration committees at the school and district levels as well as at IHEs. In the current time period, the committees can work to answer the questions in this document and co-create the return-to-school policies. After the school buildings and campuses have reopened and we are growing from this event, these committees can pivot to long-term planning on other shared goals.

Education technology is an important tool to enhance and enrich instruction for students, but it should not be used to replace or limit education employees who work with students. We

must ensure that schools do not move toward implementing technology that replaces or de-emphasizes the importance of educators. Instead, technology should be used by trained education professionals to make a better student learning experience and to teach skills about digital literacy. The essence of education is based on human interactions and relationships.

## Access to Protection

In addition to creating policies and practices to promote a culture that supports health, safety, and wellness, schools and IHEs must be prepared with proper equipment to implement those policies and practices. Specifically, schools and campuses need equitable access to protective equipment. PPE and disinfecting supplies should be consistently and fully funded for all educational institutions, so no student or educator is denied access due to cost or feels unsafe in the learning community.

## Leading with Equity

We must create a system that better serves all students and ensures every child is afforded the benefits of a great public school. We must target our education dollars to the schools and IHEs that need them most and provide extensive resources to classrooms and educators serving vulnerable and disadvantaged children. We must be relentless in our quest to eliminate opportunity and access gaps and ensure that students graduate ready to lead fulfilling lives.

For schools to be successful, policymakers must not only invest in education but also in social and economic services that affect the lives of families of students and educators. Some of these include mortgage and rent cancellation for families in economic crisis; school-based community food programs; increased local hiring to provide jobs for unemployed adults; broadband Internet and 1:1 device access for all homes; free access to higher education opportunities; and a more robust public health infrastructure, including programs like basic health screenings and widespread access to community-based mental health services. Embedding housing, food, health, dental, and job services in neighborhood schools is a common-sense and proven way to begin to address these issues and the racial inequities they create and exacerbate.

To promote racial and social justice, schools must collaboratively design plans that address the academic, social-emotional, physical, and community-based needs of Indigenous, Black, and students of color. These plans should include feedback from all school community stakeholders. Additionally, schools might consider implementing the community schools model. This model establishes teams of stakeholders—including teachers, ESPs, school and district administrators, parents, students, and community members—who work together to ensure the school is meeting the broad needs of the community and that the community is an integral part of the school. It incorporates the needs of the whole child, including strong and proven curriculum, high-quality teaching, inclusive leadership, positive behavior practices, family and community partnerships, and community support services.

---

**We must create policies and advance practices that promote racial and social justice.**

---

Regardless of how schools and communities decide to promote a more perfect nation for all our students, we must create policies and advance practices that promote racial and social justice. By joining forces as a broad coalition, we all need to attack the systems that further education inequity and make our schools a welcome and productive environment for all, including students and educators of color.



## NEXT STEPS AND CALL TO ACTION

The National Education Association will continue to address inequities in education, promote racial and social justice, and provide educators with up-to-date resources and information. We accomplish this by analyzing federal law and guidelines; identifying opportunities for advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels; and creating tools to guide educators' professional practice and learning.

Investments in our schools and communities must go far beyond what Congress has provided to date. The sooner and more comprehensively investments can be made in public schools and institutions of higher education, the faster our nation will recover from the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. By investing in our educators, public schools, and IHEs, we will emerge with stronger, more resilient, and more racially and socially just communities. Public schools and public institutions are a driving force in our nation's recovery because a school is at the heart of every community.

Join the NEA in demanding that Congress and policymakers at the state and local levels take action to ensure that students and communities rise together by:

- Stabilizing education funding for students in our communities, public schools, and campuses;
- Building bridges for educational opportunity for students and stronger communities; and
- Supporting the safety, health, and well-being of students and educators.

For additional information, visit the NEA website:

- [Educating Through Crisis](#)
- [Schools and Coronavirus: What You Should Know](#)

# COVID-19: NEA'S 15-POINT CHECKLIST

The novel coronavirus and the disease linked to it, COVID-19, create serious, complicated, and immediate challenges for educators, students and their families, and communities. As always, the NEA and our members rise to the challenge of any crisis. Take a look at the checklist below and check off the items your school community still needs in order to improve. You can find additional resources at [nea.org/covidaction](https://nea.org/covidaction).

## Accessibility to Well-Rounded Education

- Internet access and devices such as laptops are provided equitably for every educator and student household.
- Materials, such as packets or books, are provided as alternatives to digital resources to ensure all students have access to high-quality instructional content.
- All families receive appropriate lessons for students to complete at home based on grade level and ability (inclusive of physical education, music, arts, and other enrichment areas) as well as information on how to facilitate student learning, including online tutorials and access to educators or experts who can assist them.

## Instructional Leadership and Communication

- Schools engage all educators in crafting and communicating distance and digital learning plans.
- Schools communicate with all educators and the families of students with special needs related to implementing plans for the continuation of services.
- Schools communicate procedures with all students—particularly those whose educational progress, such as third grade promotion or high school or college graduation—that has the potential to be particularly disrupted by extended school closures.

## Student Safety and Family Services

- All students have safe and reliable access to their school counselors and social workers and can safely report abuse and bullying in the pandemic crisis.
- All students and families have safe, reliable, and affordable access to community healthcare and equitable access to supplemental assistance programs for food, transportation, and housing.
- All students have a timely, secure, and confidential way to ask educators or other trusted persons for help if their health, safety, or well-being is under threat, including those who may not have access to the Internet.

### **Healthy Schools**

- All education support professionals, such as school custodians and maintenance workers, have resources and training needed to maintain clean schools and campus facilities.
- Schools and campuses are being cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines.
- All educators, students, and volunteers have access to proper training and personal protective gear.

### **Supporting Quality Educators**

- Schools and campuses provide clear communication with all educators regarding closures and work expectations on a regular basis and provide training on effective techniques to prepare and deliver successful distance and digital learning.
- All educators have a secure way to submit feedback and grade reports to all students and families without compromising student data privacy or information security, including those who may not have access to the Internet.
- All educators are consulted on how to assign grades, keeping in mind factors such as student access to digital and/or alternative educational content or other extenuating personal circumstances.

# REFERENCES

[An Initial Guide to Leveraging the Power of Social and Emotional Learning as You Prepare to Reopen and Renew Your School Community](#), by CASEL Cares Initiative.

[CASEL Cares: SEL Resources During COVID-19](#), by CASEL Cares Initiative.

[Collaborating in a Crisis: Ensuring Educator Voice When It Matters Most](#), by the National Education Association.

[Collaborating in a Crisis: Working Together to Safely Reopen Our School Buildings](#), by National Labor-Management Partnership.

[COVID-19 & Race: Principles for a Common-Sense, Street-Smart Recovery](#), by PolicyLink.

[Ed Justice: COVID-19 & Our Communities](#), by the National Education Association.

[EI Guidance on Reopening Schools and Education Institutions](#), by Education International.

[Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together](#), by Dr. David E. Kirkland, Executive Director of the NYU Steinhardt Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools.

[In Response to COVID-19: A Checklist to Support LGBTQ Students During Distance Learning](#), by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and the National Education Association.

[Making Black Lives Matter at School](#), by Teacher2Teacher.

[Platform for the Schools Our Students Deserve Post COVID](#), by the Colorado Education Association.

[Protecting Worker Safety & Health in the COVID Crisis: A State & Local Model Policy Response](#), by the National Employment Law Project.

[Racial Justice in Education Framework](#), by National Education Association.

[Resource: Expanding Paid Sick Days and Paid Family & Medical Leave in Response to COVID-19](#), by the National Women's Law Center.

[Sample School Board Resolution on Supporting NEA's We Rise Together Legislative Priorities](#), by the National Education Association.

[Statewide Committee to Safely Reopen Florida's Public Schools: Priorities and Recommendations](#), by the Florida Education Association.

[Trump's call to reopen school buildings is dangerous for students, staff](#), a News Release by the National Education Association.

TSTA Standards for Safe Students, Schools, and Communities, by the Texas State Teachers Association.

UFF/FEA Higher Education Reopening Committee Guidelines: Priorities and Recommendations, by United Faculty of Florida and Florida Education Association.

Voices of Leaders for Just Schools: Equity in Education Through and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic, by NEA Education Policy and Practice.