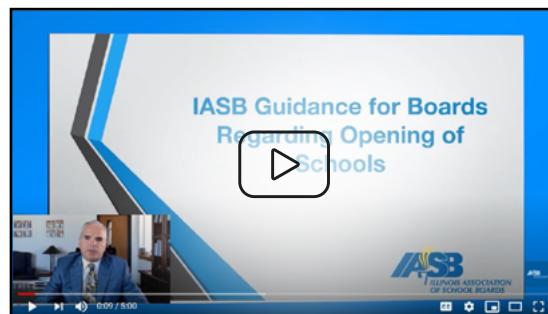


Guidance for Boards Regarding Reopening of Schools



The intent of this document is to provide a framework to guide local school boards in discussions about the reopening of school in the fall. It reflects the fact that Illinois is a diverse state and that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. Local boards of education can use this document to guide discussions of critical issues involving governance, policies, programming, personnel, health and safety of the school community, and the fiduciary responsibility of the board of education.

IASB strongly recommends that school districts work with their respective local health departments and local stakeholders to ensure that reopening plans align with the most current scientific knowledge, government orders, and community expectations. It is also important that locally developed plans remain flexible enough to allow for adaptation in changing conditions. Boards should consider a plan that includes any or all of the following areas:



In a video overview, IASB Executive Director Thomas Bertrand, Ph.D, talks about the board's role in planning and conversations about the opening of school.

Key Considerations for School Reopening Plans

- [Governance and Policy, p. 2](#)
- [Internal and External Communications, p. 3](#)
- [School Facilities, p. 4](#)
- [Academic and Program, p. 6](#)
- [Social and Emotional, p. 7](#)
- [Fiscal, p. 8](#)
- [Human Resources, p. 9](#)

Governance and Policy Considerations

The board of education plays a critical role in the development and oversight of plans involving the reopening and closing of schools during and following the pandemic. The board determines policy and the strategic priorities of the district (the “what”), while the administrative staff implements the plan (the “how”). An important part of an initial conversation within the leadership team involves determination of who will make decisions regarding the **Key Considerations** (i.e. board or superintendent), how plans will be implemented, how decisions and plans will be reported, and how progress toward initiatives will be monitored and communicated.

Key Governance and Policy Considerations

- Develop and review the process for deciding whether schools will open as normal, whether a modified opening will occur, and/or the district’s Remote Learning Plan will be implemented.
- Review the 2020-21 school calendar to determine whether contingencies or revisions are required.
- Monitor and receive updates about the District’s Remote Learning Plan ([See Academic](#))
- Review and approve the district’s technology plan to ensure the district is taking appropriate steps to expand the number of students with reliable internet access and access to technology devices. ([See Fiscal](#))
- Review and/or revise the district facilities plan, based on recommendations from the superintendent, to minimize risk of infection. ([See Facilities](#))
- Review and/or revise the budget. ([See Fiscal](#))
 - Determine how federal COVID-19 funding and other state or federal grants should be spent.
 - Ensure appropriate resources are allocated to facilitate implementation of the Remote Learning Plan and equal access to educational opportunities for all students.
- Review and approve the district’s professional development plan based on recommendations from the administrative staff. ([See Human Resources](#))
- Review the relevant district employee policies for clarity and to minimize absenteeism while encouraging employees to remain home if they are ill.
- Review student attendance policies to ensure flexibility and consider the appropriateness of removing punitive measures for absences when there is an outbreak of a contagious disease.
- Review facility use policies, including use for non-educational purposes and cancellation policies.
- Review guidance and directives from state and local health agencies to identify triggers for school building openings, closures, and to inform modification of practices such as allowing visitors and/or public access to buildings. Note that the health department has the legal authority to close school buildings.
- Review the meeting schedule for the board of education to determine whether additional meetings may be required and to allow for sufficient notification to the public.
- Review requirements of the Open Meetings Act (OMA) along with any directives from state and local health departments related to conditions that allow for conducting virtual meetings.
- Approve an alternative command structure or succession plan (PRESS Policy 3.70), with recommendations by the superintendent, in the event that the superintendent or other key administrative employees are unable to work.
 - If the district’s facilities might be used for emergency reasons, create and approve a plan with the relevant agency.
- Consider a plan to keep constituents, stakeholders, and the media aware of the district’s planning efforts. ([See Communications](#))

Internal and External Communications

Effective and ongoing communication is a critical component before, during, and after any school crisis. Implementing specific communication procedures and protocols will allow staff, students, families, and the community to safely re-engage in the education process.

- Work with the local public health department to gain a clear understanding of the notification process for reporting suspected and confirmed cases.
- Create a method for parents/students and employees to contact the district outside regular business hours when they have symptoms of or have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Prepare sample communications to parents/guardians related to the following.
 - Information on the health and safety measures the district is taking to ensure students can return to school buildings safely. The district will work closely with the local health department to develop appropriate safety protocols for students and others entering school facilities.
 - The expectations of parents and students if the district moves to Remote Learning or modified school openings (i.e. staggered start, changes in bus routing, etc.)
 - Basic information on COVID-19 and measures families can take to stay safe when not at school.
 - Reference to provisions in student handbooks related to when to keep a student home and the process for notifying the school.
 - Information on trauma-informed practices.
 - Availability of community resources (i.e. mental health resources, food security, etc.)
- Prepare communications to and for students. Examples:
 - Hang posters in all buildings and provide other messaging on hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.
 - Provide students information on suicide prevention hotline(s).
- Prepare communications to the public. Examples:
 - Post reminders at entryways not to enter the school if experiencing signs of illness.
 - Provide information on changes to policies regarding visitors to schools and public access to facilities on the district's web page and in other communications.

Continued next page

School Facilities Considerations

- Ensure that all buildings have been inspected to determine readiness for re-entry and obtain other legal and appropriate safety inspections. Examples:
 - Fire code/safety inspections of all occupied buildings
 - Health department inspections of all cafeterias
 - HVAC/air quality inspections
 - Water quality inspections for drinking fountains and bathrooms that have not been used recently.
- Know your district's plans for disinfection and prevention. Plans may include contracting with a cleaning service to treat facilities if there is a case of COVID-19 on campus.
- Ensure initial and ongoing cleaning and disinfecting of all buildings, desks, equipment, and other "high touch" surfaces prior to and after students return, using CDC and OSHA guidelines.
 - Increase frequency during the traditional flu season and if there are increased incidents of COVID-19 exposure in the area or in the school community.
- Thoroughly ventilate, clean, and disinfect all buses and other district vehicles.
- Inventory buildings to improve prevention measures. Examples:
 - Ensure there are enough accessible sinks and hand-sanitizing stations to accommodate frequent handwashing by entire classes.
 - Determine if there is a need for other protective devices for employees with repeated exposure to the public such as clear plastic barriers in school building offices.
 - Determine if sneeze guards are required in the cafeteria.
- Evaluate how hygiene products like soap, paper towels, tissues, and toilet paper are dispensed (no-touch) and how frequently they are replenished.

Additional Considerations Related to Health Services Personnel and Facilities

- Inventory and request necessary supplies for the health room and other building use. Examples:
 - PPE (gloves, masks, gowns)
 - Touch-free thermometers
 - Sanitizers/cleanser, hand soap, tissues
- Ensure that masks are available per IDPH/local health department guidelines for students and staff, but minimally for the following:
 - Nursing/health room staff
 - Any employee working with a medically fragile child
 - Any person exhibiting symptoms

Continued next page

School Facilities Considerations, continued

- Review areas used to house ill students and those requiring specialized nursing services (additional spaces may be required). Examples:
 - Provide a separate room for students/staff who might have COVID-19 or other communicable disease and are awaiting pickup. Ensure frequent disinfecting of and restricted access to the room.
 - Determine if an area separate from the nurse's office is necessary to care for students that need suctioning, tube feeding, nebulizers, etc. to minimize contact with potentially ill children.
 - Ensure furniture and other surfaces can be easily disinfected.
 - Ensure trash cans and other receptacles are no-touch.
- Ensure the use of non-contact thermometers or that a plan is in place to increase sterilization to minimize the risk of reinfection resulting from reuse of equipment.
- Determine the feasibility of telehealth options for district, staff, and family use.
- Communicate changes in procedures with families and staff.
- Contact all parents of students with medical plans in cases where changes may be needed to address practices aimed at minimizing the risk of infection to the child.
- Revise medication schedules to minimize the number of students in the nurse's office at one time.
- Prepare lists of medical/dental resources to share with families.
- Prepare to provide daily health reports to the central office and periodic summary reports to the board of education.
- Verify where staff and students can be tested for COVID-19.
- Notify the health department when student or staff absences drop below predetermined threshold.

Continued next page



Academic and Program Considerations

- Verify that school reopening plans include a diagnostic assessment component for all students returning to school to determine learning loss, to inform modifications to curriculum standards and expectations, to identify support services that may be required, etc.
- Verify that plans include established procedures for educator teams to meet and address student learning needs for both in-person and remote instruction.
- Review building schedules to ensure (if appropriate):
 - Additional time for student academic intervention and enrichment.
 - Additional time for handwashing, sanitizing desks, and other good hygiene practices.
 - Additional time for passing/transition periods and rest room usage
- Review adjustments to assessment plans and assessment calendars for the 2020-21 school year.
- Review plans for special education services:
 - Verify that plans address educational and health services if a) a doctor determines it is not safe for the student to attend school, b) the district's Remote Learning Plan is implemented, or c) modifications are made to school opening (i.e. staggered starts, etc.).
 - Plan to deliver required compensatory services.
 - Options for providing telehealth or virtual services to students.
- Enrollment of students:
 - Ensure that a screening process for enrolling transfer students is implemented after consultation with state and/or local health departments.
 - Determine if a student is transferring from a hot spot or has recently visited a hot spot and has been exposed to the virus and determine when students need to self-quarantine prior to beginning school.
- Review and prioritize school supply lists before they are publicized to reflect consideration of the economic circumstances of the community.
- Review registration and related fees to reflect consideration of the economic circumstances of the community.
- Review the district's Acceptable Use policies related to the use of devices and infrastructure by students and staff (whether on site or remotely).
- Review plans for teaching healthy habits to students and staff that are consistent with guidance from state and local health departments.

Continued next page

Social and Emotional Considerations

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

Continued next page



Fiscal Considerations

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

Continued next page



Human Resources Considerations

- Identify all items that may require consultation with the affected employee groups and their representatives. Examples:
 - Changes to the approved school calendar
 - Return to work procedures
 - Use of benefit leave; Leave of Absence Policies
 - Payments for course overloads, additional supervision, etc.
 - Expectations during remote learning.
 - Transition of students and staff from in-person to remote learning (and back to in-person)
 - Changes to job descriptions and responsibilities necessitated by shift to remote learning
 - Extracurricular stipends impacted by extended school closings
 - Emergency communication procedures with staff
 - **Consult legal counsel before modifying existing collective bargaining agreements or executing any Memorandum of Understanding with an affected bargaining unit.**
- Prepare for increased demand for substitute teachers and support staff.
- Identify potential additional costs associated with increased demand for personnel related to school closures, modified schedules, remote learning, etc.
- Assess current staff and projected need for additional staffing such as nurses, aides, etc.
- Review benefits and options for health services for staff such as telehealth, employee assistance programs (EAP), etc.
- Contact all staff
 - Verify contact and emergency contact information.
 - Verify the health and safety of the employee and their family.
 - Communicate a return-to-work plan.
 - Inform them of available benefits and programs such as the EAP.
 - Review safety procedures for employees and provide appropriate gear for those with repeated interaction with the public (plexiglass barriers, gloves, etc.).
- Provide a timely and relevant professional development program to all staff.
- Review procedures for tracking and reporting of staff attendance.