CSDE Requirements for the Re-Opening of Schools in Fall 2020 - SUMMARY

The following are **Requirements,** as defined by the Office of the Governor, the CSDE, and/ or the Connecticut State Department of Public Health, identified as necessary for the LEA to complete or comply with in order to open schools successfully in the fall.

In the Archdiocese of Hartford, schools are expected to meet or exceed these requirements to the extent feasible. These should be used to inform and guide your own school's plans for Return to In-Person Instruction. In this document, the term LEA should refer to your own school, and CSDE refers to OEEC.

Items highlighted in yellow should be more duly noted. Highlights in blue are added pieces from OEEC. However, please note all bulleted items.

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

Temporarily Choosing Not to Participate

Requirements

- Plan for parents and students who may temporarily choose not to participate in the return to school. There are defined requirements when participation of a student in the schoolhouse is limited due to a verified medical reason. However, parents and guardians may also voluntarily choose for students to temporarily engage in learning from home for a variety of other reasons. LEAs should develop temporary support options for students who continue remote learning from home. In developing these plans, options include but are not limited to:
    - Consider how retired teachers and/or teachers who voluntarily identify as "high risk" or otherwise need to be accommodated outside of the school house may support operational needs via remote learning, including but not limited to the following:

        - ❖ Working with students (virtually) who are unable to attend school;
        - ❖ Developing and implementing district professional development (PD) (virtual or in person);
        - ❖ Assisting with continued PD to train teachers who need assistance with best practices for virtual teaching and learning.
        - ❖ Serving as online tutors for those who need additional assistance.

School Liaison, Communications Plans, and Data Collection

Requirements

School Liaison:

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

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Communications Plan:

☐ <mark>Put systems in place to communicate the most up to date policies and protocols related to the considerations herein, for staff, students, and families</mark>. Schools should leverage multiple communication methods (mail, e-mail, phone calls, text messaging, <mark>video-messaging</mark>, social media, and school websites). Ensure all policies and protocols are clearly marked with version and date, as they may change over time. Consider a COVID-19 landing page in which communication and guidance can be updated regularly.

☐ Make communications plans available in relevant languages of families in the community, as well as accessible to those with visual and/or hearing impairments.

☐ Ensure the development of plans for ongoing two-way communication with the school community (staff, families, and students) about any new policies and/or protocols *prior* to reopening, any time there is a significant policy change, and upon re-entry if a school closes temporarily during the year. This should include feedback and consultation regarding the implementation of those policies.

☐ Develop expectations around frequency of communication, and ensure detailed updates are provided any time critical information regarding policies, protocols, or health data changes.

☐ Put in place a plan for how the community will be notified of any changed policies, need to cancel classes, or other changes or restrictions.

Data Collection:

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

Facilities

Classroom Layout

Requirements

☐ <mark>Maximize social distancing between student workstations, achieving 6 feet when feasible</mark>, when determining the classroom layout. Desks should face in the same direction (rather than facing each other), or students should sit on only one side of tables, spaced apart*.*

☐ Where necessary, assess other space that may be repurposed for instruction in the school, in municipal or other community space, or if the school will require additional modular space.

☐ <mark>Maximize space between the teacher and students due to the risk of increased droplets from teachers during instruction</mark>. If a teacher removes face covering or mask during instruction, spacing should be increased beyond six feet. For teachers who stay seated, a physical barrier may be an effective option.

☐ <mark>A face shield over a face mask provides an extra level of protection</mark>.

Reopening of Facilities Before First Day of Classes

Requirements

☐ Comply with DPH Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting of Schools during COVID-19.

☐ Comply with DPH Return to Service Guidance for Building Water Systems.

Signs and Messages

Requirements

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

Ventilation

Requirements

☐ Comply with DPH Guidance for School Systems for the Operation of Central and non- Central Ventilation Systems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training Related to Facilities

Requirements

☐ Identify the training needs of staff related to health and safety protocols; perform such training prior to the first day of classes. If the school nurse is unable to provide the training along with the blood-borne pathogen training, OEEC will make available a video that can serve as training tool.

☐ Plan an in-person or online training that includes: social distancing; cleaning protocols; and hygiene practices. Require attendance by all students and staff, and make available to families who are interested. Consider repeating this training during the first months that school reopens, and as needed.

☐ Ensure training is provided to substitutes or others who may enter the school outside of the first day or typical calendar start.

Bathroom Protocols

Requirements

☐ Comply with DPH guidance for cleaning and disinfecting of schools during COVID-19.

☐ Maximize use of disposable towels in lieu of hand dryers, due to ventilation considerations. Turn off and avoid use of hand dryers.

☐ Restrooms must be cleaned at least twice a day (per CDC guidelines).

Alternative Disinfection Methods

☐ The efficacy of alternative disinfection methods, such as ultrasonic waves, high intensity UV radiation, and LED blue light against COVID-19 virus is not known.

☐ EPA does not routinely review the safety or efficacy of pesticidal devices, such as UV lights, LED lights, or ultrasonic devices. Therefore, EPA cannot confirm whether, or under what circumstances, such products might be effective against the spread of COVID-19.

☐ CDC does not recommend the use of sanitizing tunnels. There is no evidence that they are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. ***Chemicals used in sanitizing tunnels could cause skin, eye, or respiratory irritation or damage.***

☐ CDC only recommends use of the surface disinfectants identified on List Nexternal iconexternal icon against the virus that causes COVID-19.

Daily Operations

Flexibility and Compartmentalization of Protective Measures

Requirements

- ☐ Develop the policies and protocols related to facilities and operations with the understanding that schools may need to react quickly to changing conditions.

- ☐ Ensure options to increase, or relax restrictions are available throughout the school year to respond effectively to changes in public health data. This requires compartmentalized solutions that can be deployed or recalled in a timely and organized way.

Class Groups and Teams (Cohorts)

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

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

Other Individuals Entering the School Building

Requirements

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

Child Nutrition

Requirements

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

Buses, Vans and Student Transportation Vehicles

Requirements

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

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

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

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

Standard Public Health Practices and Adequate Supplies

Requirements

- ☐ Ensure that students are educated and engaged in the new expectations related to all public health policies and protocols. As part of this requirement, assess the best approach to communicating the information for the age group, and plan to set aside time at the beginning of the school year, as well as frequent reminders, to review the new policies and protocols.

- ☐ Familiarize all participants of the standard public health practices used to prevent the spread of diseases. These practices include, but are not limited to:
  - o social distancing,
  - o frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer,
  - o use of face coverings that completely cover the nose and mouth,
  - o respiratory and cough etiquette, and
  - o enhanced cleaning/disinfection of surfaces.

- ☐ Provide adequate supplies, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol (for staff and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, cloth face coverings (as feasible), and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans.

Immunizations and Health Assessments

Requirements

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

Reporting Illnesses and Addressing Vulnerable Populations

Requirements

Staying at Home

- ☐ Instruct students and staff to inform the school if they are sick with COVID-19 related symptoms, particularly if they had a known contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have also had contact with the school population. They must stay home when they are sick, especially if they have COVID-19 symptoms such as fever and cough. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has provided guidance that confirms that, during a pandemic, it is permissible to ask employees if they are experiencing symptoms of the pandemic virus (such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.) Employers must maintain all information about employee or student illness as a confidential medical record.
- ☐ Develop consistent protocols for information reporting, and a point person to appropriately receive and safeguard this information, such as the school nurse, district nursing supervisor, or principal.
- ☐ Educate staff and families about when to stay home. Schools should properly communicate the content of this or any updated guidance.

o   Instruct staff and students (or their parents and guardians) to perform a self-assessment prior to leaving for school to identify fever and other possible COVID-19 symptoms. Communicate this expectation and provide parents with reminders about the symptoms consistent with COVID-19 that require keeping their students at home. Examples include a check-list for parents or a web-based application such as Connecticut How We Feel.

o   Establish and communicate school-wide sick protocols, including signs and symptoms of COVID-19, and temperature thresholds requiring students or staff to stay home.

o   Consistent with the applicable laws and school policies, offer options for school and work to staff and students with special healthcare needs (e.g., remote learning options, alternate or modified job responsibilities).

Social Distancing

Requirements

☐   In conjunction with the considerations outlined concerning classroom and hallway social distancing rules, assist staff and students to maintain social distancing between individuals to reduce the transmission of the virus per the public health guidelines at that time.

☐   Be prepared to adjust the approach to social distancing if guidance from the CDC or DPH changes due to shifting public health data or evolving understanding of COVID-19 disease, including transmission.

Use of Face Coverings, Masks, and Face Shields

Requirements

☐   Adopt policies requiring use of face coverings **for all students and staff when they are inside the school building, with certain exceptions listed below.**

o   For anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance, face coverings and masks should not be required, per CDC guidance.

o   For anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face covering, masks should not be required.

☐   Be prepared to provide a mask to any student or staff member who does not have one.

Planning and Distribution of Information

Requirements

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

Containment Plan

Requirements

☐   Include in the LEA reopening plan written protocols for containment and immediate response if an individual has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, there is a known exposure, or a member of the school community has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19. The purpose of containment plans are to decrease the risks of spreading COVID-19, and shall include the following:

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- o Immediate coordination with the local health department, including being ready to comply with requests for information from the local health department to assist with contact tracing.
- o Consideration of what signs and symptoms exhibited by students or staff would require their immediate dismissal from school; for what period of time; and conditions for their re-admittance to school.

- ☐ If any person who has been present in school has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, the local health department must be notified immediately. This can be done through the school nurse.

- ☐ Identify an "isolation room" (besides the health office) to accommodate students who exhibit symptoms consistent with COVID-19 until a parent or guardian arrives. Students should remain supervised in the isolation room. For the purposes of contact tracing, schools should log all persons who entered the room. The individual supervising the room must be equipped with proper PPE.

- ☐ Initiate recommended CDC cleaning procedures following a confirmed COVID-19 case.

- ☐ Create a consistent policy for dismissal of students or staff who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 and must be dismissed from school. Include input, where appropriate, from the local health department, school medical advisor and school nurse supervisor.

Cancellation of Classes

Requirements

- ☐ Develop a plan for school class cancellations and reopening to be implemented in the event that the superintendent, their designee, or state government suspends or cancels in-school classes for some or all participants.

- ☐ Notify and consult with the OEEC ~~CSDE~~ immediately if the LEA is contemplating class cancellations.

- ☐ Assume that any decision about school closure, reopening, or cancellation of school events will be made in coordination/collaboration with local health officials, and with the advice of the school medical advisor (if any) and school nurse supervisor.

- ☐ Anticipate that recommendations for the geographic scope (e.g., a single school, multiple schools, the full district, regionally), whether it will be partial or total, and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis using the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the community.

- ☐ Include a communication plan and clear policies for faculty and staff regarding individual roles and responsibilities in the event of a shutdown occurring during the school year.

- ☐ Prioritize ongoing educational opportunities when drafting the plan for shutdown. Materials for continuity of learning must be made available to allow for school sessions to continue remotely.

Future Planning for Remote Blended Learning

Requirements

- ☐ Be prepared to provide remote blended learning opportunities immediately upon cancellation of in-school classes.

- ☐ Develop a plan for extended absences and communicate it with parents or guardians in the event of a second extended closure. Particular attention must be placed on communicating the distribution of food and devices or learning materials. Materials must be modified for use by students who are differently abled or multilingual.

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Physical Education, Athletics, Arts, and Extracurricular Activities

Requirements

- ☐ Follow all CDC, state, and local guidelines related to social distancing and disinfecting areas and equipment used for physical education and physical activity, including recess.

- ☐ Develop plans for the implementation of a physical education, fine arts, and music curriculum that consider the needs of all students, including focusing on activities, adaptations, and modifications of all education decisions to ensure the full inclusion by all students.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health

Requirements

- ☐ Develop a detailed plan to reengage all students, staff and families. Particularly identify strategies to identify and engage populations and specific students that have been disengaged.

- ☐ Prepare staff to identify issues related to abuse and neglect in the context of the pandemic and comply with all mandated reporting requirements.

After-school Programming

Requirements

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

Certification and Personnel Planning

Requirements

- ☐ Prepare with school human resources and board counsel to comply with legal and regulatory requirements related to personnel, including but not limited to the EEOC guidance related to the ADA and the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ☐ Assess how to engage a full roster of staff, including potential substitute plan, and whether stipends or changes in substitute pay is required to support the needs of the school.

Special Education

Requirements

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

Relevant Resources:

CSDE: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/CTReopeningSchools.pdf

CDC Guidelines: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html

American Academy of Pediatrics: https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/

https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx

Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting of Schools: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Coronavirus/20200622-DPH-Guidance-for-the-Cleaning-and-Disinfection-of-Schools.pdf

COVID Print Signs and Resources: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc