



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

Guidance for Boards Regarding Reopening of Schools

Key Considerations for School Reopening Plans

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Note:

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 Virginia is a diverse state and that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. Local school boards 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 school board.

Considerations for Governance and Policy

The school board 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 division (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 whether the division’s Remote Learning Plan will be implemented.
- Review the 2020-21 school calendar to determine whether contingencies or revisions are required.
- Encourage superintendents to review relevant regulations.
- Monitor and receive updates about the Division’s Remote Learning Plan.
- Review and approve the division’s technology plan to ensure the division is taking appropriate steps to expand the number of students with reliable internet access and access to technology devices.
- Review and/or revise the division facilities plan, based on recommendations from the superintendent, to minimize risk of infection.
- Review and/or revise the budget.
- 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 division’s professional development plan based on recommendations from the administrative staff.
- Review the relevant division 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 school board to determine whether additional meetings may be required and to allow for sufficient notification to the public.
- Review requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) along with any directives from state and local health departments related to conditions that allow for conducting virtual meetings.
- If the division’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 division’s planning efforts.

Considerations for Communications

Effective and ongoing communication is a critical component before, during, and after any school or community crisis. Implementing specific communication procedures and protocols will allow staff, students, families, and the community to safely re-engage in the education process. It is also important to ensure that the school board is aware of the communications that are distributed to the community.

- 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 division outside regular business hours when they have symptoms of or have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Work with community agencies, local government, Chamber of Commerce, health-related groups (including hospitals/clinics), and higher education to provide consistent and factual messaging that reaches a broad audience.
- Determine primary means to release information once it is available:
 - Website
 - Email
 - Social media
 - Print copy mailings
 - Voice and/or video messaging
 - Traditional media outlets
 - Develop a regularly updated FAQ site
- Prepare sample communications to parents/guardians related to the following:
 - Information on the health and safety measures the division is taking to ensure students can return to school buildings safely. The division should 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 division 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 division's web page and in other communications.

Considerations for School Facilities

- 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 division'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 of cleaning and disinfecting 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 division 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 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
- 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.

Additional Considerations Related to Health Services Personnel and Facilities (Continued)

- 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 division, 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 school board.
 - Verify where staff and students can be tested for COVID-19.
 - Notify the health department when student or staff absences drop below predetermined threshold.



Considerations for Academics

- 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 division'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 division'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.



Considerations for Social and Emotional Health

- 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 division staff are trained to implement the process.
- Review what actions to take when a student screens positive for a mental health crisis.
- Review the division'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.

Considerations for Fiscal Management

- Review the process for equipment inventory that includes a process for distributing and collecting division 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 division'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 of in-person learning and school closures on construction projects.

Considerations for Human Resources

- Ensure information on the COVID-19 federal leave is posted in all the buildings.
- Review and revise staff contracts and employment documents for the 2020-21 school year to anticipate implementation of any new schedules or plans.
- 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.
- Consider employing more nurses, health care aides, and full-time substitute employees.
- Review division benefits in light of the pandemic. Examples:
 - Are there health service options covered under the division's insurance if the traditional doctor's offices are not available such as clinics or telehealth services?
 - Given the number of people unemployed, there will likely be more employees looking to add family members to division health insurance.
 - If the division offers short-term disability benefits, would a COVID-19 illness qualify for benefits?
 - Work with benefit providers to increase communication to employees on the insurance options available, how to enroll family members who may have lost their jobs, the fact that immunizations are covered and the locations where they can be obtained, and the availability of alternative health service options.