

OEA

OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



ADVOCATING FOR MEMBERS, STUDENTS, AND COMMUNITIES

An OEA Action Plan for preparing for the 2020–2021 School Year



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



The Ohio Education Association represents more than 120,000 of Ohio’s elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Governor of Ohio, the Ohio Legislature, and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) have indicated they will give tremendous latitude to local school districts in deciding how to reopen schools. Beyond mandating the wearing of face coverings for school staff, the Governor has indicated that most other guidance is optional. This strategy will undoubtedly create numerous approaches to reopening schools and present a challenge to union members and union staff as they continue to work to protect the health and safety of students, educators, and support staff.

The following guide was developed by OEA as a supplement to ODE’s *Reset and Restart Education Planning Guide for Ohio Schools and Districts*.

This document includes three checklists that will aid in creating and analyzing return to school plans—education considerations, social-emotional considerations, and operational considerations. A fourth checklist addresses the many health and safety considerations that will need to be addressed to safely restart in-person instruction. There is also a quick guide to navigating local health boards.

OEA staff and member leaders should use these checklists to engage in a collaborative planning with their school district. If the school district refuses to include the local union in the planning process, these checklists can be used to analyze the plan as it is presented by the district and highlight holes in the plan that could endanger the safety and productivity of students and staff. In districts where union members are not being included in return to school planning, locals should work with their OEA Labor Relations Consultant (LRC) to launch a campaign with the goal of ensuring the district is properly following public health guidelines.

While the checklists will certainly not be exhaustive, upon their completion the local union should have a clear idea of the place in which the district’s return to school planning can be strengthened. This document, in conjunction with NEA’s *All Hands on Deck: Initial Guidance Regarding Reopening School Buildings and NEA Guidance to State and Local Associations for Reopening Schools, Colleges, and Universities for In-Person Instructions* along with the resources provided by local, state and national health agencies will give local union leaders everything they need to ensure the best possible outcome in these incredibly challenging times.

“It is now more important than ever for union members to do what they do best – lead the way in protecting our students, our communities, and each other.”

Scott DiMauro, OEA President



HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Now more than ever, school districts, staff, and students are facing unprecedented challenges. Districts are burdened with developing and implementing plans that support the continuity of educational school-based services while ensuring the health and safety of staff and students. Staff are forced to summon the strength and courage to work in an environment that places their personal health and safety at risk while executing the added protocols outlined in their district's reopening and safety plans. Students are forced to face a different learning environment, a learning environment with restricted and/or eliminated school-based activities, and restricted interaction with teachers, support staff, and classmates.

In addition to the multitude of back-to-school tasks that districts and staff are required to do (i.e. curriculum planning, school nutrition mapping, transportation logistics), they must also figure out how to incorporate best worker health and safety practices that reduce disease transmission. District reopening plans will need to support individuals at the greatest risk of contracting the virus at work and protect the broader community from the spread of COVID.

Reopening plans and safety plans should include:

- Guidance considerations from the Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Education, CDC, and other federal and state agencies
- Partnership between the local health agency, district, and staff
- Consistent District-wide collaboration
- Fair and equitable health & safety needs analysis of all job classifications
- Personal commitment to health and safety

District plans will need to include a coordinated and collaborative process that includes staff insight and collaboration. As stakeholders, staff need to conduct partnership-based discussions that specifically address worker health and safety needs. District and staff should use guidance from the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Department of Education, and local health agency to jointly develop plans that include localized public health-based safety measures. These safety measures enforce workplace standards that would keep both workers and the broader public healthier. Staff representatives should work to build a relationship with local health authorities to ensure that information is being properly communicated from those agencies to students, staff, and the community.

District plans will also need to provide staff with methods to address health and safety mitigation needs, when appropriate. As staff prepares for the start of school, they need to be aware of how the District reopening plan affects them. Each individual staff member will need to ensure that the embedded safety plans provide adequate worker health and safety protections. The following questions are provided to help assess concerns centered around worker health and safety in a school environment:



| | Y | N | N/A |
|--|---|---|-----|
| Is the school district working with the local health authority to develop the reopening plan? | | | |
| Has the reopening committee done the Student's Daily Journal exercise and shared the results? (see sample below) | | | |
| Does the district's reopening plan allow enough time to implement, train, and communicate the details of the plan to staff, students, and the community? | | | |
| Will the district adopt a face-mask policy to comply with the State of Ohio mandate? (Please see Operational Considerations for more details re: face masks) | | | |
| Are there accommodations being made to protect staff and students who are considered to be high-risk? | | | |
| Is there a plan to train staff and students on hand sanitizer safety protocols (usage, bulk storage, poison-control, etc.)? | | | |
| Is there a plan to conduct temperature checks on employees and students as they enter the building and/or board school transportation? | | | |
| Does the building have a designated room where students and staff showing symptoms can safely self-isolate? | | | |
| Does the reopening plan address the following best practices? | | | |
| - Enhance ventilation by increasing air exchanges in rooms. | | | |
| - Modify workstation layouts to ensure all employees and students remain six feet apart. | | | |
| - Close off common areas where staff and students are likely to congregate and interact. | | | |
| - Increase the frequency of cleaning frequently touched surfaces and shared objects. | | | |
| - Minimize the number of staff and students present, balancing the need to protect staff and students if they require in-person congregant settings. | | | |
| - Will in-school meals be provided using individually wrapped, ready-to-serve food items and safely handled pint milk cartons? | | | |
| - Will water fountains be shut down and replaced with other forms of hydration (i.e. personal water bottles from home)? | | | |

CDC guidance on people who may be at increased risk for COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

Note that ODE's plan calls for at-home temperature checks.





| | Y | N | N/A |
|---|---|---|-----|
| Is there a plan for contact tracing following either a staff or student positive COVID test? | | | |
| Is there a plan for staggered drop-off and pick-ups to reduce contact among parents? | | | |
| Is there a plan to limit sharing of supplies and remove any supplies that cannot be easily disinfected? | | | |
| Does the sanitization allow for these three critical steps in proper sanitizing? | | | |
| Direct contact between the chemical and the microorganism (soil, dead microbes, and other barriers may prevent contact) | | | |
| Sufficient time to allow the microorganism to be effectively killed | | | |
| - Correct temperature to allow the microorganism to be effectively killed | | | |
| - Was the sanitization plan developed based on CDC guidelines and recommendations? | | | |

More information available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>





SAMPLE STUDENT'S DAILY JOURNAL

ODE's Reset and Restart discussion guide suggests that school districts create a sample student's daily journal as a thought exercise to aid in creating return to school plans. Below is a sample of a completed daily journal entry:

- Waking up in the morning: Will parent/guardian take my temperature? Will parent/guardian really be able to keep me home if I am not feeling well/running a temperature (because I am sometimes forced to go to school when I tell them I am not feeling good). I sure hope I don't have to wear my mask.....I am not sure where it is at....and it stinks because it is dirty.
- Transportation to the physical school building: I can't wait to hang out with my friends while waiting at the bus stop. We can goof around, play tag and be kids because no one is there to make sure we are practicing social distancing and wearing our masks.
- Waiting to enter the building: If I miss the bus, I am usually just dropped off in front of my school along with lots of other kids. We can play around until someone tells us to stop.
- Entering the building: I have a hard time keeping my hands to myself. I usually grab things and drop my stuff as I walk. I also try talking and sharing stories with my friends when we walk into school and towards our lockers/classrooms.
- Waiting inside the building in designated areas,
- Latchkey: I wonder if parent/guardian will know that I am not feeling well. I heard my friend tell me he isn't feeling well but his mom said he had to go to school because she can't miss work. I like this time because I get to hang out with my friends and goof around.
- Locker visits: Our school hallways are small and our lockers are super close to each other. I have the bottom locker. I hope my locker buddy (top locker) brushed his teeth today because every time we have to get our books, I can smell his breath. GROSS! He also has allergies and sneezes all the time!
- Changing classes, using the restroom, lunch/cafeteria (breakfast and lunch), gym/PE, recess, etc.), and returning home: These are the times where I try so hard to hang out with my friends. My teacher can't see me and my friends all the time because we have lots of kids in our class. My teacher also doesn't go into the boy's restroom because, well, she's a girl! This is where we can goof around as long as we don't make any noise. We trick her to think we washed our hands by just running water and taking paper towels and running the hand dryer. My mom says we have to count to 20 when we wash our hands but we get into trouble if we take too long in the restroom at school. I don't want to lose recess time.
- Recess: What do you mean we can't play on the recess equipment? We can run around but not play tag? What fun is THAT??



EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

As school districts consider how they might reopen in-person instruction, educator voice and perspective become increasingly important to ensuring that the needs of students and educators are met. The COVID health emergency poses challenges for ensuring the continuity of education and school-based services. School closures, and the unplanned transition to distance learning during the Spring of 2020 led to educating and learning under challenging and sometimes unpredictable circumstances. Our members showed ingenuity, flexibility, and professionalism as they quickly pivoted to distance learning and adapted their lessons and instruction to meet the needs of their students and their communities.

Students and staff need equitable access to technology to instruct and learn. Educators need clear policy decisions and technology support and training as they provide distance learning for students. Families need training and support to use technology distance learning programs effectively. Educators need clear guidance on how they are to engage with students and families when using technology platforms. Educators need clear and consistent guidelines on how to provide special education services for students in a remote learning environment that is accessible and ensures that FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education) for students with disabilities. Any instructional plan should ensure a balanced curriculum. It may be challenging to provide instruction outside of core subjects, but educational service delivery should include arts and other enrichment instruction, physical education, and other non-core learning areas. Finally, distance learning during the COVID health emergency has increased workloads for many of our educators; workloads will need to be adjusted to ensure that educators are able to meet the needs of their students.

The need for social distancing in educational institutions will probably require a combination of in-person learning blended with distance learning in the fall. Looking forward to the fall and beyond, there is an opportunity to address the impacts of the school closures this spring and to learn from and build on the distance learning plans of this past spring. Among the issues that need to be considered are the following:



| | Y | N | N/A |
|---|---|---|-----|
| Is the district offering modified schedules and/or other accommodations for staff with pressing medical needs? | | | |
| Has the district made instructional accommodations for students that wish to remain at home? | | | |
| If the district has made modifications to the structure and/or schedule of the school day: | | | |
| - are the modifications practical for students and staff? | | | |
| - are the modifications recorded in a written set of guidelines that have been shared with students and staff? | | | |
| - do the modifications allow for all students to complete lessons regardless of the student's ability to access technology and/or has the district ensured every student has access to the required technology? | | | |
| - are the modifications done in a way that will allow caregivers to return to work? | | | |
| - have the modifications been properly bargained? | | | |
| Is the district providing professional development opportunities that align with the instructional plan? | | | |
| If using a digital platform, is support being provided to families and students to ensure that they understand and know how to use the digital platform? | | | |
| Has the district implemented a uniform tracking document for special education delivery? | | | |
| If reopening athletics, does the district have a plan to address the cleaning and disinfection of athletic facilities? | | | |
| In the event of an extended closure, is there a plan to assess, grade, and provide feedback to students? | | | |
| If the district has enacted staffing reductions, have the programs been adjusted to accommodate the smaller staff? | | | |
| Has the school district assessed increased workload due to remote instruction for: | | | |
| • pupil services job classifications (e.g. school counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists) | | | |
| • Intervention specialists | | | |
| • General education teachers | | | |
| • ESP's (e.g. custodians, school secretaries, instructional assistants, bus drivers) | | | |



| | Y | N | N/A |
|--|---|---|-----|
| Has the school district created distinct educational plans that accommodate the needs of each level of Ohio's Public Health Advisory Alert System. | | | |
| Has the school district submitted Ohio's Blended Learning Model Declaration to the Ohio Department of Education? | | | |
| Is there a communications plan to engage and educate the school community and staff about the reopening plan and process? If so, is that plan available in multiple languages and to meet needs of school district families and accessible for those who are hearing and/or vision impaired? | | | |
| Has the school district assessed which students and families do not have access to necessary technology and connectivity to equitably participate in distance learning? | | | |
| Is there a plan in place to ensure equitable distance learning? (Provision of necessary equipment and broadband Internet access, training, etc.) | | | |
| Does the school district have clear expectations for how staff shall interact with students and families while engaging remotely? | | | |
| Does the school district have enough books and/or instructional materials for each child? Is there a plan in place to address staff and student trauma? | | | |
| Does our school district's instructional plan focus of student learning rather than student testing? | | | |
| Did the school district engage the association, parents and the community in its school reopening plan development? | | | |





SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

It is imperative that local unions play a pivotal role in proactive discussions with District Administration regarding providing resources to support the well-being of staff members and students. Any return to school plan adopted by Districts must include mental health support services for staff members and students to address the anxiety, grief, panic, and wide array of emotions triggered by the COVID pandemic. Social and emotional health considerations must be a pillar within the framework of a return to school plan. District's must prioritize caring for the wellbeing and mental health of employees in the face of the significant stress levels that staff members will likely be feeling when returning to school. Staff members who are compromised by stress cannot be expected to create thriving environments for students to excel. Students thrive in spaces created and sustained by thriving adults. Staff members will need advocacy, appreciation, and support. Likewise, specific attention to the high levels of trauma and mental health issues of students when returning to school must be discussed in developing a District's return to school plan. Students may be experiencing ongoing trauma related to prolonged physical distancing, issues at home, food and housing insecurities, harms arising from a parent's or guardian's job loss, or family illness or loss in relation to COVID. Return to school plans must include programming supports for students in addressing trauma related needs.

Based on the above, local unions should consider addressing the following key areas regarding social and emotional health as a part of a return to school plan:



| | Y | N | N/A |
|---|---|---|-----|
| Does the reopening plan make social-emotional health a primary focus and first consideration? | | | |
| Does the reopening plan ensure that students and staff are psychologically prepared for learning and teaching? | | | |
| Have the district and the Association worked to create a statement stating a commitment to student and staff mental well-being? | | | |
| Does the reopening plan reduce stress for educators/students/families and not create additional stress? | | | |
| Will the timing of student assessments take into consideration the emotional stress of students returning to school? | | | |
| Has the district collaborated with staff regarding the best time and method for student assessments? | | | |
| Are there bargained professional development opportunities available related to social emotional issues? | | | |
| Have staff been provided with information about all the resources available through the Employee Assistance Program? Is the EAP easy to access? If available, have staff been provided information regarding telehealth options? | | | |
| Have staff been provided effective training regarding identifying student trauma related to COVID? Has a clear and concise process to report this trauma been developed and communicated with all staff? | | | |
| Are staff informed on the process for referring students to mental health professionals and resources? | | | |
| Does the reopening plan include provisions to address and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable students? Has staff been consulted regarding best practices to support this population of students? | | | |
| Is there a process in place to identify and address issues and resources that cannot be adequately provided by the District? | | | |
| Does the reopening plan identify resource partners to assist with issues related to social and emotional health? (e.g. Behavioral and health providers, county boards of mental health, community-based providers, etc.) | | | |
| Has a consistent and common narrative been created and provided to staff to speak with students regarding COVID? | | | |
| Have pupil services staff members (i.e. guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, nurses, etc.) been consulted and surveyed regarding specific needs in relation to their roles and additional levels of needed support? | | | |
| Has there been a review of any current PBIS program in collaboration with staff for revisions or alternative programs? | | | |
| In the event distance learning is being utilized, does the plan address the emotional and social needs of students in a distance learning platform? | | | |



OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

School personnel who conduct the daily operations of buildings, particularly Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) in our school buildings, are an indispensable link in ensuring that our students experience high quality education in the safest environment possible. Secretaries and clerical staff regulate the entrance and exit of outside visitors and manage much of the daily building operations. Bus drivers and transportation staff transport our students to and from school and ensure their safety and adherence to health guidelines while in transit. Custodial and maintenance staff clean and sanitize all surfaces and contact areas to slow the transmission of the deadly virus. Kitchen staff ensure that despite a global pandemic our students continue to receive what for many is their most reliable means of daily nutrition. It is vital that any plan for a return to school does everything it can to best equip and protect these essential employees. Keeping these priorities in mind, here are the items that should be considered:

| | Y | N | N/A |
|---|---|---|-----|
| Face-masks: | | | |
| - Is the policy clear about who is required to wear a mask (students, teachers, support staff, visitors, etc.)? | | | |
| - What, if any, exceptions will be allowed? | | | |
| - Is there a clear and well communicated policy regarding how exceptions will be documented? | | | |
| - Will students be required to wear a mask prior to boarding district transportation? | | | |
| - Is there a written protocol for how to handle someone who refuses to wear a mask? | | | |
| - Is there a clearly written quality standard for what qualifies as a mask? | | | |
| - Will the district provide face-masks to all staff, students, and visitors? | | | |
| - Is there a plan to maintain a sufficient stock of masks in all buildings and on school transportation? | | | |
| - Is there a contingency plan should there be a shortage of masks? | | | |
| Is there a plan to ensure that the district maintains adequate supplies of hand sanitizer and disinfectant? | | | |
| Are buses being routed to ensure appropriate staffing and safety protocols are being followed? | | | |
| Is there a specific transportation boarding policy that will be implemented? (e.g. load back to front)? | | | |



| | Y | N | N/A |
|---|---|---|-----|
| If temperature checks are required to board district transportation, is there a written policy that includes procedure for denying a student entrance to the vehicle? | | | |
| Is the district providing training to bus drivers and bus aides re: proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures? | | | |
| Are custodial and maintenance staff properly trained in the handling and use of chemical disinfectants? | | | |
| Is there a plan to have sufficient staffing levels of custodial/maintenance staff throughout the day? | | | |
| Are there policies and procedures that expressly consider the unique work of secretarial and clerical staff? | | | |
| Have office layouts been altered to maximize distancing and minimize congregation of people? | | | |
| Is there a plan for providing students daily access to meals in a manner that meets health guidelines? | | | |
| Are food service staff being provided with proper special training? | | | |
| Has the district created age-appropriate recess and recreation opportunities that are safe for students and staff? | | | |





BUILDING A PLAN

The preceding set of checklists is meant to provide local unions with a practical tool for creating and analyzing return to school plans in Ohio. When used in conjunction with the two NEA documents that are summarized below, this document should serve as one piece of a larger planning process that includes a focus on student equity and continues to push the local union's involvement in all aspects of return to school planning.

NEA Guidance to State and Local Associations on Reopening Schools, Colleges, and Universities for In-Person Instruction

This internal document provides details on addressing bargaining and legal issues, including employment rights issues. The document includes specific, detailed sections on bargaining around wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. The document also addresses issues of inequality, provides guidance on First Amendment protections for public school employees, and includes its own checklist for preparing to return to school. This guidance document is meant for union staff and member leaders and should not be publicly distributed.

All Hands on Deck: Initial Guidance Regarding Reopening School Buildings

This external document, which is hosted on NEA's Educating Through Crisis webpage, is meant to be shared with school district leaders and other partners as part of a collaborative process to plan the reopening of schools. All Hands... is built around four basic principles: 1) Health expertise 2) Educator voice 3) Access to protection and 4) Leading with equity. The document includes an extensive guide to the various issues that must be considered when creating a reopening plan, including preparing school facilities, preparing staff, social distancing, and contingencies for rolling school closures.



LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICTS

Ohio's public health system emphasizes local control. The system consists of the statewide Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and 113 local health districts. Like local school districts, local health districts operate independently but in concert with state and federal agencies.

There are three kinds of local health districts: county, city, and combined (city and county). Each local health district is governed by a Board of Health. Boards of Health are appointed either by a district advisory council (county) or by the mayor with confirmation from the city legislative authority (city). Each Board of Health hires a Health Commissioner, who directs the daily operations of the local health department.

Local health departments are generally divided into at least three areas: Administration, Personal Health, and Environmental Health.

- Administrative staff may work on vital statistics, accounting, human resources, grant writing, and legal support. Law also requires that departments employ a Medical Director if the Health Commissioner is not a physician.
- Personal health program areas may include injury prevention, nursing, dental services, and nutrition services.
- Environmental health program areas may include food protection, healthy schools, water and land protection, and vector/rat control.

Local Health Departments work with community leaders to ensure community health and safety. These departments develop and implement programs to meet state and local public health goals, which include reducing morbidity and mortality associated with diseases, injuries, and environmental conditions.

CONTACTING YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) maintains a directory of local health departments, where you can find contact information for all 113 districts:

<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/find-local-health-districts>

If you live near two or more local health districts, you can enter your home or school address via the comprehensive search tool at the top of the page to find the local health department that covers your area.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ohio Education Association: <https://www.ohea.org/oea-coronavirus-faq/>

National Education Association: <https://educatingthroughcrisis.org/>

Ohio Department of Health: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>

Ohio Department of Education: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Coronavirus>

Local Health Districts Directory: <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/find-local-health-districts>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>