



*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

As Adopted Unanimously by the Ohio Education Association Board of Directors

December 3, 2020

Position Statement on “Putting Education First” in Regard to Containing the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Ohio Education Association is committed to the success of students and the educators who support them and promoting safe and equitable learning opportunities while our state and local communities continue to contend with the deadly impact of a global pandemic. We understand the critical importance of in-person instruction and the personal connections between students, teachers, and education support professionals in school buildings, but know that learning is impossible if fundamental health and safety needs are not met.

OEA has always advocated for strong public schools and recognizes the critical importance of our schools in meeting the academic, social, emotional, physical and mental health, and nutritional needs of over 1.7 million children and their families. Safe and equitable schools are the linchpin of thriving communities and a functioning economy. Operating schools safely, however, requires a commitment on the part of elected leaders and all Ohioans to make sacrifices necessary to truly put education first.

With the goal of putting education first, the Ohio Education Association calls for the following steps to ensure that the needs of Ohio’s students, educators and communities are met:

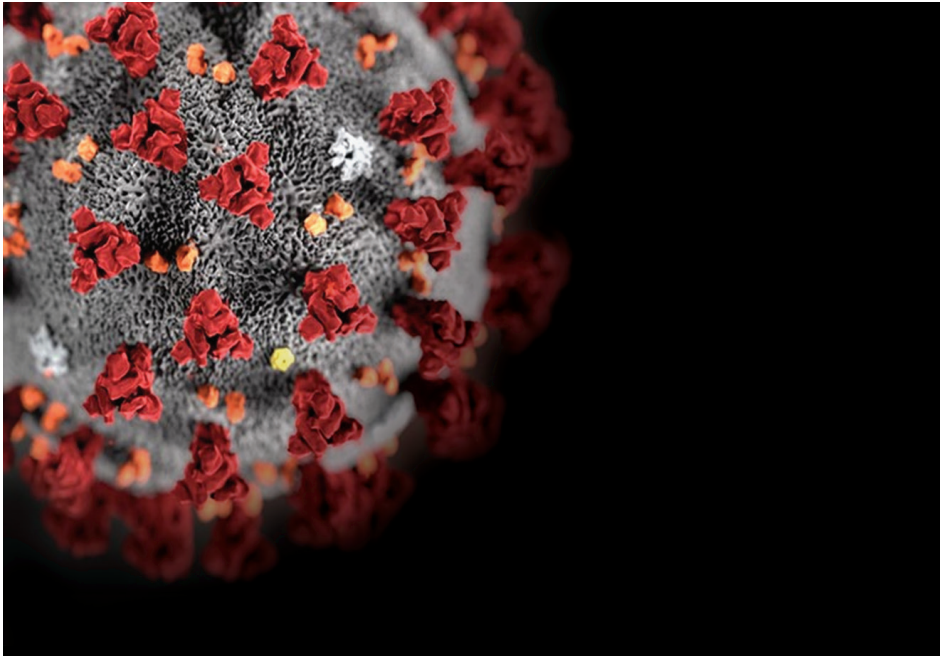
- 1. Reset:** Due to the extraordinary and dangerous spike in COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths across the state since early November and anticipated additional increase in case numbers arising from social gatherings over the Thanksgiving holiday, OEA calls for the immediate suspension of all in-person instruction until January 11, 2021 to allow for a statewide post-holiday quarantine period and a safe restart of in-person instruction at the conclusion of that period. The decision to provide remote instruction or suspend instruction altogether and extend the school year should be a local one in conformity with any applicable collective bargaining agreement, but schools should regardless use this period to refine their delivery model and make other necessary adjustments to allow them to execute their instructional plan. Essential programs, such as food delivery, will need to continue regardless of the school’s operating status.
- 2. Restart:** Prior to reopening, schools must be required to receive sign-off for their instructional model and staff safety plan from their local board of health certifying that they comply with all safety requirements as outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (See attached checklist for details.) Schools that are unable to obtain sign-off must be required to operate fully remote and shall not hold extracurricular activities. Once approved by local boards of health, instructional plans shall be filed with the Ohio Department of Education and made public. Any substantial changes to a district’s plan will need to be approved by the local board of health before they are initiated. Local boards of health shall follow CDC guidelines regarding in-



person instruction when evaluating instructional plans and consider local conditions such as transmission rates and healthcare capacity prior to approving a school Restart plan.

- 3. Re-Prioritize:** The education of our children must be the top priority in every community. State and local government should do whatever is necessary to slow the spread of this disease and diminish its impact on the delivery of instruction. These efforts should include mask wearing, limits on crowds, and expansion of testing and contact tracing programs. OEA fully supports maintaining the authority of the Governor and Ohio Department of Health to implement and enforce efforts to contain community spread, including but not limited to expanding contact tracing and testing programs and strict enforcement mask orders, limits on large gatherings, and closure of non-essential businesses and services that are known to increase the risk of community spread of the virus.
  
- 4. Resource:** Federal and state authorities must support students, families, schools, and workers until an effective vaccine is widely available and the spread of COVID-19 is stopped. This support should include prioritizing school funding to meet emergency and long-term needs, subsidizing local boards of health, and providing unemployment and health insurance benefits for every worker and small business owner impacted by COVID related shutdowns and restrictions. Additionally, OEA expects employers to refrain from reductions in force or furloughs of employees during the temporary suspension of in-person instruction. OEA calls on Congress to put partisan politics aside and pass a new critically-needed relief package to ensure schools and communities have the funding and staffing needed for safe and equitable learning opportunities for all students, especially those in high-poverty areas, and to extend essential Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA) leave provisions that allow for at-risk education employees to maintain their livelihoods without losing their lives.

The Ohio Education Association is committed to investing the necessary resources to support all of its local affiliates in effectively advocating for safe and equitable learning opportunities for our members and students. We are committed to putting education first and call on our elected leaders to do the same-not just with words, but with actions.



# EDUCATION FIRST: REOPENING CHECKLIST

This checklist synthesizes recommendations from the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for in-person schooling. The education of children should be a top priority for every community. State and local officials, including schoolboard officials, should follow public health guidance to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission in schools.



### **FACE MASK USE IS ENFORCED**

- Clean masks are available for all students, teachers, staff, administrators, and visitors
- Face masks are mandatory in school buildings, and people are required to put on a mask if they are not wearing one
- Face masks are mandatory on school property when people cannot consistently maintain six feet of physical distance, and people are required to put on a mask if they are not wearing one
- People in school buildings and/or on school property receive regular reminders about how to wear face masks properly

### **BUILDING LAYOUT ENABLES SIX-FOOT PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

- People can always maintain six feet of physical distance between themselves and others in school buildings
- If necessary, classroom capacity is reduced to enable six-foot physical distancing

### **HAND-WASHING STATIONS AND HAND SANITIZER ARE AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE**

- Sinks are stocked with soap and are available to everyone in school buildings
- Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol is available to everyone in school buildings
- People studying or working in school buildings have time during the day to wash their hands multiple times for at least 20 seconds
- People in school buildings and/or on school property receive regular reminders about how to practice proper hand hygiene

### **HIGH-TOUCH SURFACES ARE FREQUENTLY SANITIZED**

- High-touch surfaces are frequently cleaned and disinfected
- Adequate supplies are available to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces

### **SCHOOL SCHEDULING PERMITS FIXED COHORTS**

- Students remain with the same cohort (group of students)
- Teachers, staff, and administrators interact with one or a limited number of student cohorts
- Cohorts do not mix with one another in cafeterias, hallways, gyms, or other public space



### **COVID-19 TESTS ARE READILY AVAILABLE**

- People studying or working in school buildings can take COVID-19 tests when they need them
- People studying or working in school buildings can quickly receive COVID-19 test results when they get tested
- People studying or working in school buildings receive regular information about testing availability in their communities

### **CONTACT TRACING PROTOCOL ARE IN PLACE AND CONSISTENTLY APPLIED**

**Note:** Some local departments of health in Ohio have made exceptions to the CDC definition of close contacts for school nurses, counselors, and others who come in frequent, close contact with children and wear medical-grade surgical masks while working.

- The school district has protocol for tracing close contacts when someone tests positive for COVID-19
- The contact tracing protocol uses the Center for Disease Control (CDC) definition of “close contact”
- People studying or working in school buildings have been informed of the contact tracing protocol
- Contact tracing happens swiftly (i.e., close contacts are identified right away)
- Close contacts are notified as soon as they have been identified through the contact tracing protocol

### **QUARANTINE PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE AND CONSISTENTLY APPLIED**

- People who test positive for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate until at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, at least 24 hours have passed with no fever (without fever-reducing medication), and other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving
- People who have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 are required to quarantine for 14 days, regardless of whether they have received a negative COVID-19 test

*“As an option for reducing quarantine time, the CDC advises that people who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, and who themselves have no COVID-19 symptoms, may quarantine for 10 days, or 7 days if they have received a negative COVID-19 test. People should continue monitoring for symptoms for 14 days.”*

### **BUILDINGS ARE WELL VENTILATED AND PRACTICES FOR INCREASING AIR CIRCULATION ARE IN PLACE**

- Windows are kept open if weather permits
- When possible, HVAC systems are run at maximum outside airflow for two hours before and after school hours
- When possible, high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems are used to improve air circulation





### **SCHOOL POLICIES REFLECT CURRENT RESEARCH ON COVID-19 VULNERABILITY BY AGE**

- Whenever possible, high school students have access to hybrid or remote learning
- Students younger than ages 10 – 14 receive priority for the resources and space required for in-person learning

### **THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT IS ENGAGED IN THE SCHOOL'S COVID-19 SAFETY PLAN**

- The local health department has signed off on the school's COVID-19 safety plan
- The local health department has had direct communication with the local union about COVID-19 safety

### **FACE MASK USE IS ENFORCED**

Face masks, including cloth face masks, are effective at reducing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 infections. One systematic review of 172 scientific studies on COVID-19 and masking found “wearing face masks protects people (both health-care workers and the general public) against infection.” On August 13, 2020, the Ohio Department of Health issued an order requiring face mask use (with some exemptions) in school buildings and when people cannot consistently maintain six feet of physical distance on school property.

### **BUILDING LAYOUT ENABLES SIX-FOOT PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

Physical distancing—along with other mitigation measures—helps reduce the spread of respiratory droplets, through which the SARS-CoV-2 virus can travel from person to person. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends maintaining at least six feet of physical distance from others to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

### **HAND-WASHING STATIONS AND HAND SANITIZER ARE AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE**

The SARS-CoV-2 virus can spread when respiratory droplets collect on people's hands and transfer to their eyes, nose, or mouth. The CDC recommends handwashing with soap for at least 20 seconds and using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

### **HIGH-TOUCH SURFACES ARE FREQUENTLY SANITIZED**

Although sanitizing surfaces is one way to reduce the spread of COVID-19, research finds that surfaces cleaned using standard protocol are unlikely to be a significant source of viral transmission. Schools should implement COVID-19 cleaning and sanitization procedures without allocating all resources toward disinfectant and other supplies for cleaning high-touch surfaces.

### **SCHOOL SCHEDULING PERMITS FIXED COHORTS**

When community transmission is high, the Ohio Department of Education recommends cohorting groups of students, and sometimes teachers and staff, to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in a school setting. Cohorts reduce the number of possible close contacts a person can have throughout the day.





### **COVID-19 TESTS ARE READILY AVAILABLE**

COVID-19 diagnostic tests detect active coronavirus infections. Two types of tests are currently available: molecular tests detect SARS-CoV-2's genetic material, and antigen tests detect specific proteins from the virus. Diagnostic tests can identify COVID-19 infections, even when a person is asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. This is important because research continues to show that asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic people can transmit COVID-19. One study found, "patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection are likely to be most infectious in the first week of illness," all or part of which may be before symptoms appear.

### **CONTACT TRACING PROTOCOL ARE IN PLACE AND CONSISTENTLY APPLIED**

Contact tracing helps to slow the spread of COVID-19 by identifying and isolating people who have been in close contact with a person infected with COVID-19 before new infections develop. The CDC defines "close contact" as being within six feet of another person for 15 minutes or more during a 24-hour period.

### **QUARANTINE PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE AND CONSISTENTLY APPLIED**

The CDC recommends that close contacts quarantine for 14 days, even if they have tested negative for COVID-19. This is because it may take up to 14 days for a COVID-19 infection to develop and be detected by a diagnostic test.

### **BUILDINGS ARE WELL VENTILATED AND PRACTICES FOR INCREASING AIR CIRCULATION ARE IN PLACE**

Research suggests that SARS-CoV-2 transmits primarily through respiratory droplets or aerosols. Combined with other mitigation measures, improving air filtration and circulation can help to disperse respiratory droplets and aerosols carrying SARS-CoV-2 before they are inhaled by others.

### **SCHOOL POLICIES REFLECT CURRENT RESEARCH ON COVID-19 VULNERABILITY BY AGE**

Children younger than the age range 10 – 14 may be less likely to contract and spread COVID-19. A meta-analysis of 32 studies found "preliminary evidence that those younger than 10 to 14 years have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection than adults, with adolescents appearing to have similar susceptibility to adults." A literature review found that COVID-19 can spread in secondary schools, but found limited evidence of significant COVID-19 spread in elementary schools. Following this research, Michigan and Kentucky have instituted age-specific in-person schooling orders that require remote schooling for high school students and prioritize in-person schooling for younger students.

### **THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT IS ENGAGED IN THE SCHOOL'S COVID-19 SAFETY PLAN**

Like local school districts, local health departments operate independently but in concert with state and federal authorities. Ohio has 113 local health departments, the responsibilities of which include tracking COVID-19 infections in schools and discussing COVID-19 safety plans with school administrators. Local union leaders (and community members) can communicate directly with local health departments. This search tool on ODH's website can help you find your local health district: <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/find-local-health-districts>





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/DO-K-12-facial-coverings.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Considerations-for-Schools-and-Districts-in-Purple>

<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/coronavirus-disease-2019-testing-basics>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/contact-tracing.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2771181>

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.19.20157362v2>

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31142-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext)

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[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247\(20\)30172-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanmic/article/PIIS2666-5247(20)30172-5/fulltext)

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