

Covid-19: Questions to Consider Before School Reopens

School districts across Vermont are making plans for reopening schools for the 2020-21 school year. Vermont's [Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) is on the Vermont Agency of Education's [website](#). This Guidance states (pages 9-10): "School nurses will play an essential role related to high risk populations of students, including those with special health needs. In these cases, a team-based approach to care is recommended to assess risk to this population. Teams include the school nurse, the student's health care provider, IEP team members, parents/caregivers, teachers and paraprofessionals as appropriate and develop shared goals within and across settings to achieve care that is safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient and equitable."

To guide these discussions and to ensure that various needs of families and students are taken into consideration, here are some questions that you may want to ask your school district and your child's school team about school reopening.

School Operations:

- Where can I find information about school district policies and procedures for school reopening?
- How will the district implement appropriate social distancing and/or face coverings to ensure the health and safety of students and staff?
- How will the district implement enhanced cleaning and disinfection of school transportation vehicles and school buildings?
- How will school ensure the safe distribution of breakfast and lunch?
- In the event of a blended/hybrid approach to schooling, how will food services effectively switch between in school and remote learning?
- How will the monitoring of the implementation of safety protocols be conducted?
- How will the school district ensure that the implementation of physical distancing (e.g. dividers or partitions) doesn't become a barrier to inclusion?
- How will the school district promote compliance with safety and social distancing?
- Will ongoing educational training be provided to students, staff, and their families on safety precautions, safe interactions, and current health guidelines?
- How will students and staff be checked for symptoms of Covid-19? Will there be on-site Covid-19 testing?
- What is the plan if a student, student's family member, or district staff member becomes directly impacted by Covid-19?

School Operations (continued):

- Would the school district be providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to students and staff?
- Will wearing masks by students and staff be mandated to protect the health and safety of all? What if my child cannot wear a mask for a long period of time?
- What would a typical school day look like for students in terms of student schedules, including bus schedules, class size, class changes, lunch, before and after school activities and clubs, tutoring, and sports?
- How would school transportation services be provided in accordance with health and safety standards?
- Could parents who choose to transport their children to and from school due to health concerns be able to get reimbursed by the district for mileage?
- Will the school appoint a designated staff person, who is a Covid-19 point of contact, responsible for responding to Covid-19 concerns from staff and families? Who is that person?
- What is the school district policy for return-to-school after Covid-19 illness?
- How will privacy and confidentiality be ensured if a student, staff, or members of their immediate family become sick with Covid-19 symptoms, test positive for Covid-19, or have been exposed to someone with Covid-19 symptoms?
- Will hand-washing or hand sanitizing stations be installed in each classroom and areas used by students and staff?
- What remote learning opportunities and resources will be provided to students with medical complications who are unavailable for face-to-face learning to ensure education equity?
- How will students who are quarantined receive education?
- How will the school attendance and discipline policies be impacted?
- How does the school district plan to provide educational programs for all students during the regular school day, as well as before and after school programs?

Academic Recovery:

- How will the district be reassessing all students when schools resume to determine their learning needs and provide individualized instruction?
- What professional development will be provided to teachers in online platforms and using tech tools to support remote instruction?
- How will the school district ensure that educators have timely access to student performance data and professional learning opportunities so they can effectively provide personalized learning and track student progress?

Academic Recovery: (continued)

- What happens if parents do not feel comfortable with their student attending school in-person? Will the instruction be provided in an alternate format? What will it look like?
- How will [compensatory services/extended school year services](https://www.vermontfamilynetwork.org/what-we-do/resources/publications/) be determined for students with disabilities and when will that happen?

Sample Letters to Request Compensatory Services
<https://www.vermontfamilynetwork.org/what-we-do/resources/publications/>

- What will the [Extended School Year services](#) look like for my child with disabilities?
- Will the district consider offering more in-person learning opportunities for young children, students with disabilities, English language learners, homeless and migrant students, students in foster care, and economically disadvantaged students whose needs are more intense and who have been disproportionately impacted by the extended school closures?
- How will students receive a well-rounded education, including fine arts, music, physical education, and extracurricular activities, despite social distance restrictions?
- Have you considered how requiring educators to wear masks, if mandated, will impact students' ability to hear and understand instruction, particularly for early readers, English language learners, and students with disabilities?

Social-Emotional and Health Supports:

- How will the school district be assessing mental health needs of students and staff before beginning the instruction and throughout the school year?
- Will mental and emotional support related to loss, grief, stress, anxiety, and trauma be provided to students and staff?
- How will the school district identify ongoing needs for social services, academic supports, and supplemental assistance needs of students and their families and provide supports and resources essential for student success?
- How will the school district help students, especially students who are new to the school, feel welcome, safe, comfortable, and alleviate their fears?
- What options are available for families of children with medical complications that may prevent them from returning to school for in-person instruction?
- How will the school district incorporate movement activities at regular intervals throughout the day to promote student and staff health and wellness?
- What will trauma-informed school culture and wrap-around supports look like in each school building?

Social-Emotional and Health Supports: (continued)

- How will additional Covid-19 related support protocols be integrated in my child's [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#) or [Section 504 Plan](#)?

Remote Learning and Family Engagement:

- What specific tools, virtual platforms, and communication channels will be used to establish and maintain ongoing staff-student-parent collaboration?
- What instructional resources will be provided to families to facilitate learning at home, for example, textbooks, learning plans, and school supplies?
- Will my child be provided with an Internet service/ hotspot and a 1:1 computer or electronic device at no cost to enable remote learning?
- What ongoing training and support will be provided to parents/caregivers and other family members to effectively support learning of their children at home, including online tutorials and access to educators who can assist them?
- What supports will be provided to families who are English language learners? How does the district plan to communicate with those families?
- Will digital literacy instruction and resources on how to use distance learning programs be available for families and in multiple languages?
- What conditions will prompt physical school buildings to close again? How will learning continue? How will these conditions be communicated to families so they can be prepared?
- How will the school district provide clear and frequent communication to families so that they have the most up-to-date information related to student schedules, instruction, progress monitoring, or any information related to Covid-19?
- How will the school district ensure that the voices of students and their families are reflected in priorities and solutions outlined in school policies, procedures, and programs for school reopening and closures?
- Will in-person parent meetings, such as [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#) or [Section 504 Plan](#) team meetings be permitted?
- To what extent will school district-based, parent-led organizations like PTOs/PTAs be able to continue to meet in schools?
- How will schools make information available to all families, regardless of Internet access, languages spoken in the community, or accessible formats, about school reopening/closures and changes impacting student learning?
- How will student, family, and community voices be included in the assessment process to determine the needs and assets related to academics, physical and mental health, social-emotional, technology, and socioeconomic conditions for student success?