BACK TO SCHOOL

COVID-19
Reopening Schools Planning
Assumptions & Considerations
During his press conference on April 14, 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom unveiled California’s Roadmap to Modify the Stay-at-Home Order, which describes six indicators that must be met before governor’s executive order can be modified. In his presentation, the governor described the need after the stay-at-home order is lifted to “toggle back and forth” on social restrictions in response to changing conditions until “herd immunity” is achieved in the state.

Based on available information as of April 28, 2020, it is reasonable and prudent for the K-12 schools in Kern County to create contingency plans for reopening schools based on the following **Asssumptions & Considerations.**
Assumptions

1. The virus that causes COVID-19 will remain in circulation until a vaccine is developed and widely used.

   a. A vaccine is not likely to be in broad use during the next 18 months.

   b. During this time, improvements in understanding of the virus and in testing will allow public health officials to act with greater precision when taking steps to slow the rate of infection. Broad stay-at-home orders and long-term school closures are not likely to be needed in the future.

   c. A second wave of infections is expected, possibly coinciding with flu season in October or November. This wave will not be as significant as the first but could result in site, district, regional, or countywide school closures for up to four weeks.

   d. Short-term closures of single or multiple schools will remain a possibility until a vaccine is widely used.

   e. Children and staff with significant health conditions will continue to be especially vulnerable during this time.

   f. Teaching and reinforcing prevention behaviors (handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette) and promoting flu vaccinations will continue to be important strategies in slowing the spread of this and other infectious diseases.

   g. Frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces will also be needed throughout this period.
2. It will be safe for schools to return to normal operations when all the following have occurred:

   a. The California stay-at-home order has been lifted.

   b. The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county has remained constant or declined for a period of time as determined by the local public health department.

   c. A directive regarding social distancing and group gatherings has been established and implemented.

3. When schools are permitted to re-open, it is likely that operations will need to be modified to include:

   a. Proactive screening of students and staff for symptoms

   b. Social distancing in all settings (including home-to-school transportation)

   c. Schedules of school days to align with feeder districts when applicable

4. Conditions are not likely to improve quickly enough to allow schools to resume normal (pre-pandemic) operations and are likely to require modified operations.

   a. When the stay-at-home order is lifted, limits on group size are likely to still be necessary. Loosening of restrictions is likely to be stepped down in phases.

   b. It is unlikely that traditional graduation ceremonies and promotion assemblies will be allowed this summer. Even if permissible, convening groups large during this time frame may still be inadvisable.

5. Deaths from COVID-19 are possible while the virus is in circulation.

   a. While the stay-at-home order and/or restrictions on group size are in place, normal community support mechanisms will not be available to assist with grieving.

   b. When schools can resume operations, deaths within the school community from COVID-19 will still be possible, especially for children and adults in high-risk categories.
6. Fear, loss, and isolation will result in the need for increased mental health supports.

a. The strain of a 12 to 18-month duration will overwhelm the coping skills of many.
b. Coping for people with pre-existing mental health concerns will be very difficult.
c. Suicide attempts and completions will rise.
d. Substance abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence are also likely to rise.

7. The economic impacts of the pandemic will have significant and lasting impacts on schools.

a. State tax revenues will fall well below those of previous years with reductions in school funding likely.
b. Job layoffs and business closures will result in higher levels of unemployment, which could contribute to enrollment decline.
c. School nutrition programs will be needed by more students and will become a more significant portion of their access to food. Accommodations to provide continued access to meals for children who are ill or required to self-isolate may be necessary until COVID-19 is controlled.
d. The number of children and families experiencing homelessness and eligible for the support and protections required under the McKinney-Vento Act is likely to increase.

8. School district enrollment may decline at a faster rate than we’ve seen in many areas of the country.

a. Parent demand for enrollment in distance learning programs will increase as many will perceive them as a safer and more stable alternative to classroom-based instruction while COVID-19 is in circulation.
   
   • Charter schools with well-established distance learning programs may see increased enrollment.
   
   • Demand for enrollment in district and charter distance learning programs will also increase each time health officials impose social controls in response to upticks and hotspots.
9. **Student and employee attendance rates may decline into the school year.**

   a. Students and staff with COVID-19, and those who are directly exposed, may miss two or more weeks of school. In larger households, children may be required to miss school for an extended period if the disease affects other members of their family.

   b. School staff will become more concerned about COVID-19 symptoms and encourage students and staff with symptoms to stay home.

   c. Fear and rumors will also negatively impact student and employee attendance rates.

   d. Temporary employees/substitutes may be in more demand as employee absences rise.

   e. Staffing changes may increase due to possible retirements.

   f. Providing childcare for employees who are required to be at work.

10. **Student learning outcomes going into the 2020-21 year will be uneven and vary broadly.**

    a. Students could begin the next year with learning deficits.

    b. The most able and advantaged are likely to be better off.

    c. The most disadvantaged are likely to suffer learning regression.

11. **Increases in special education due process filings and demands for compensatory education are likely to increase unless relief from some of the provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is authorized.**

12. **There will continue to be a broad spectrum of opinions in the community regarding government and school responses (from overreacting to under reacting) to COVID-19. Impacts could include:**

    a. Non-compliance with measures enacted by the school

    b. Increased contact with school leaders, superintendents, and board members

    c. Demonstrations
13. Structural changes (staggered schedules and/or blended learning configurations) needed to implement social distancing, and periodic school closures, will increase childcare needs for many families and create new challenges for before- and after-school programs.

14. The challenges posed by COVID-19, and the duration of this threat, will make it more difficult for school districts to make unified decisions. Differences in resources, negotiations, community concerns, and direction from county public health services in response to local conditions will impact local decision-making.
General Considerations:

1. **When reopening schools, districts and charter schools should consider the following:**

   • Will parents/guardians resist the idea that it is safe to return their children to school so soon after the apex of this crisis? If so, what messaging will the district/charter provide? (protocols and procedures)

   • Will staff resist the idea that it is safe to return to work so soon after the apex of this crisis? If so, what messaging will the district/charter provide? (protocols and procedures)

   • Protocols and Procedures to consider: (use the following in the messaging to parents and staff)
     1. What special accommodations do we need to protect vulnerable students and employees?
     2. Do we have the supplies we need to maintain heightened prevention measures (hand sanitizer, cleaning, disinfection products, and personal protective equipment)?
     3. Do we have a plan to prevent symptomatic and asymptomatic spread?
        • Are we prepared to implement social distancing in all settings?
        • Do we have a plan to ensure all students and staff wear face coverings, if required?
        • Are we prepared to screen children and adults entering campuses for symptoms, if required?
     4. What will the required instructional minutes be if not all students are able to be on site at the same time?
     5. Will student attendance calendars align with feeder districts, if applicable?
     6. How will the layout of a classroom, cafeteria/MPR, playground be designed while adhering to the social distancing requirements? Will staggered or alternating schedules be required to accommodate?
     7. How will home-to-school transportation be modified while adhering to the social distancing requirements? Will staggered or alternating schedules be required to accommodate?

   • Have we prepared our employees to return? Have we identified all their concerns and are we prepared with responses?

   • Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
2. Adapt all processes (traditional, distance learning, hybrid) and timelines necessary to prepare for the new school year.

- Use job-alike groups to examine all routines used to prepare for the next school year and develop alternative means for accomplishing the needed outcomes.
- Include adaptations that incorporate social distancing and online alternatives.
- Include special accommodations for people who are at higher risk, those who may be sick or who must self-isolate, and those who lack internet access.
- Ensure ongoing collaboration with employee associations.

3. Prepare for the possibility that the start of the 2020-21 school year may need to be delayed if another surge should occur.

- Student calendars need to be adjusted accordingly. If school start dates are in July, this possibility could be more likely than those starting in mid-August.

4. Create plans to restore operations in phases.

- Reopening schools will require careful identification of the activities needed for return and the order in which they should be implemented. Create timelines and communication plans to support each phase. Such activities include, instructional and special needs are initial implementation and sport events/assemblies are secondary.

5. Consider the precautions necessary to protect students and staff with special needs relative to the threat posed by COVID-19.

- What does a free and appropriate education look like for students who are immunosuppressed or who have significant health challenges?
- What special procedures will be necessary to protect students and staff in classrooms that serve severely handicapped students?
- What is our plan for determining appropriate placements, services, and accommodations for:
  1. Students supported by Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
  2. Students supported by 504 plans
  3. Students supported by medical plans
- Does the district/charter have ample PPE supplies to provide protection for students and staff?
6. Create plans to assess and respond to the uneven outcomes created by school closures.

• What formative assessment tools can we use to understand the individual and collective needs of our students?

• What is our plan to accelerate learning and close gaps?

• What process will we use to access and remedy impacts to students with specific learning needs:
  1. Students supported by IEPs
  2. Students supported by 504 plans
  3. English learners
  4. Foster Youth
  5. Homeless students
  6. Migrant
  7. Socio-Economic disadvantaged

7. Develop a continuum of distance learning options.

• Develop robust independent study programs as an alternative for parents who want this option. Include a variety of options that allow students in independent study programs to participate in campus life (electives, sports, dances, etc.).

• Consider the use of learning centers to support student learning with weekly in-person and virtual appointments for support.

• Develop the capacity to provide synchronous interactive distance learning (via classroom webcast) as a means of providing instruction for students who cannot physically participate in classroom instruction.

• Develop the capacity to provide home and hospital instruction (Education Code Section 48206.3) via the internet (Zoom or other means) to assist students who are ill, under quarantine, or in self-isolation.

• Use a virtual learning center approach to provide individual and small-group instruction to all students at least once per week by appointment.
  
  o Provide in-person appointments using social distancing and prevention measures as an option if connectivity is not available.

• How do we deliver instruction and ensure learning is going on?
  
  o Provide adequate training for staff to deliver high quality instruction.
  o Provide students a paper packet alternative if connectivity is an issue or unavailable.
  o Students are being assessed adequately to ensure learning is happening and making progress.
8. **Develop a continuum of strategies for implementation if social distancing is required.**

- Identify all locations and times where students are in close contact with each other and create strategies to restructure those locations and activities.

- Consider altering bell schedules, staggering start times, creating multiple recess and lunch periods, and creating multiple meal distribution points.

  In secondary schools, consider implementing a block schedule to reduce student movement during the day and cross contamination of classrooms.

- Consider the impact of social distancing on school provided transportation.

- Create plans that respond to the impact of these strategies on the need for childcare, and before- and after-school programs.

- Create plans for continuous and ongoing collaboration with bargaining units.

- Create a contingency plan to provide childcare for staff who have a staggered work schedule due to social distancing requirements.

- Keep each child’s belongings separated from others’ and in individually labeled containers, cubbies or areas.
9. Create and implement plans to limit symptomatic and asymptomatic spread.

- Screen all students, employees, and visitors for symptoms including fever.
  - Who will do the screenings? Where will screenings occur (office, bus stops, classroom)
  - If a student arrives at school with a fever, where will the student wait until parents pick up?

- Require all students and staff to wear face coverings (consider how to manage younger students).

- Determine what supplies will be required (face covering, thermometers, personal protective equipment, etc.).

- Create staffing plans, modify job descriptions, negotiate needed changes.

- Signage that is clearly displayed and provides clarity on hygiene and safety requirements.

- Set up hand sanitizer stands and modular washing stations throughout the site that does not have permanent washing stations nearby.

- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms during hours of operation.

- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone sick home or to a healthcare facility, as appropriate.

- Advise sick staff members not to return until they have met CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation.

- Monitor absenteeism to identify any trends in employee or child absences due to illness.

- Ensure that student and staff groupings are as static as possible by having the same group of children stay with the same staff.

- Restrict nonessential visitors, volunteers and activities involving other groups at the same time.

- Close communal spaces such as break rooms if possible.

- Limit sharing of foods, tools, equipment or supplies.

- No field trips, inter-group events, or extracurricular activities until guidance allows by state and/or local health department officials.
10. Develop plans to blend classroom and distance learning as an alternative to school closures.

The following are examples for purposes of visualization only. Each district will have specific needs which would necessitate a different example.

Example 1:  Limit the number of students on campus to 50% of normal.

• Divide all classes into two equal groups: Example: one would come to school on Monday and Tuesday, the other on Thursday and Friday with deep cleaning on Wednesday.
  o Secondary schools could also implement a block schedule to reduce passing periods and lower the frequency of touches in each classroom.

• All teachers provide each group with two days of direct instruction and support, and three days of assignments to complete at home each week.

• Provide take-home meals for each eligible student before they leave each day.

Example 2:  Limit the number of students on campus to 20% of normal.

• All classes are divided into five equal groups: one for each day of the week.

• All teachers provide each group with one day of direct instruction and support, and four days of assignments to complete at home.

• Provide take-home meals for each eligible student before they leave each day.

• Use Friday for teachers to provide individual or small-group support by appointment or to prepare packets for the next week.

Regardless of the option selected above, the following must be considered when planning:

1. Lunch serving logistics (cafeteria/MPR setup)
2. Infrastructure and Connectivity in place to ensure equitable access for all students
11. Consider making work assignments and/or accommodations to protect employees in high-risk groups.

- When possible and appropriate, assign teachers in high-risk groups to independent study programs.
- When possible and appropriate, assign classified employees in high-risk groups to roles and environments where social distancing can be maintained.
- Consider staffing ratios in programs like Special Education.
- Consider equity of workload for those staff that are working in alternative settings.
- Consider the installation of physical barriers in reception areas and workspaces where the environment cannot accommodate social distancing.

12. Develop and implement strategies to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

- Teach handwashing and cough and sneeze etiquette at all grade levels and reinforce on an ongoing basis.
- Schedule time and structure routines for handwashing at the start of each class period.
- Schedule frequent disinfection of high-touch surfaces.
  - Staffing consideration to ensure sanitizing occurs between groups.
- Signage is clearly displayed and provides adequate expectations.
13. Develop plans to support the mental health of students and families.
   • Implement social-emotional learning lessons to develop strong coping skills.
   • Adapt Multi-Tiered System of Support to work when schools are working under the modifications described above.
     - Implement strategies to ensure all students are highly connected to the school. Make sure all students have positive, meaningful, and dependable contact with at least one employee each week.
     - Implement systems to identify students who are struggling and to provide appropriate support.
     - Ensure mental health supports are appropriate for students who have known challenges.
     - Incorporate regular check-ins with parents and offer supports and resources appropriate to their needs.

14. Develop plans to provide access school meal programs for qualifying students who are impacted
   • Develop procedures that allow a parent or an adult designated by the parent to pick-up meals for children who are absent due to illness or who are required to self-isolate.
   • If classroom and distance learning will be blended, include procedures to allow qualifying students to take home meals for the days they will not be on campus.
   • Develop procedures to provide access to meals for qualifying students enrolled in fulltime independent study programs.
   • NOTE: Advocacy with state and federal legislators may be required to support these recommendations.
15. **Develop procedures to identify and assist students who are experiencing homelessness.**

- Develop strategies to mitigate the impact that site/office closures, limitations on walk-ins, and limited office hours, has on a school’s ability to identify children who are eligible for McKinney-Vento support and protections.

- Develop procedures for regular contact with parents experiencing homelessness to prepare them for each shift in school operations.

- Consider transportation if required under federal mandate for students.

16. **Ongoing collaboration with employee associations when developing plans that impact the work of their members.**

17. **In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the community.**

- Work with Local Department of Health Department to determine if a temporary closure (a few days) would be needed for deep cleaning and disinfection.