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Preparing our Schools for Reopening



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May 7 · 5 min read



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As the coronavirus has spread across the US, shattering lives and upending the economy, Americans have come together in extraordinary ways. We have recognized a new breed of hero in the medical professionals and first responders who risk their lives to care for the suffering — and in the humble, poorly-paid supermarket workers, food handlers, delivery people, and others who also put their lives on the line to meet the needs of those who are sheltering at home.

As we begin to take our first tentative steps to re-open its economy, it is important that we begin now to plan for our kids' eventual return to school — not just the K through 12 students, whose parents need to go back to work, but college students. Protecting the lives of each and every individual — students, faculty, support staff, and their loved ones at home — must remain our principle focus. Until there is a vaccine or we have herd immunity, there will almost

certainly be second and even third waves. What we put in place now can make all the difference.

While some schools may be restricted by budgets and other regulations, and recognizing that some of these suggestions may work for younger or older kids, here are some ideas schools can start to think of for implementation in the fall.

1. **All large gatherings must be eliminated**, such as assemblies and rallies; they can broadcast into classrooms instead. Zoom and other conferencing software can be used for large-scale lectures for college kids. The best instructors can offer classes to unlimited numbers of students and will naturally rise to the top.

2. **Cafeteria.** Children who can should bring their own food and eat it at their desks. Those on state funded meals can get their lunches on staged schedules in cafeterias that have been reconfigured for optimal social distancing. No buffets or shared eating areas; all groups should be less than 10, with 6 feet of separation.

3. **Fresh air.** Weather permitting, doors and windows should be kept open to ensure the continuous circulation of fresh air. Schools may want to consider removing all doors from classrooms completely. Classes should be held outside as much as possible.

4. **Improved filtration.** The filters on air conditioners need to be changed more frequently; if possible, ceiling fans should be installed and kept running to push droplets to the ground.

5. **Janitorial services.** Classrooms and common areas should be wiped down with antibacterial products every day. If cafeterias are closed, their workers can be reassigned to help keep the buildings sanitized.

6. **Hand washing stations.** Wipes and hand sanitizer should be provided in all high-traffic areas. All publicly-accessible sinks should be designated as hand-washing stations. Every hour on the hour, all students and faculty should stop what they are doing and wash their hands.

7. **Eliminate door-handle use.** Doors should be propped open when students are entering and exiting; wherever safety and fire regulations permit, they should propped open all day.

8. **Deliveries and outside contractors.** Deliveries should be made outside of school hours; contractors who need to work in schools should wear PPE.

9. **Social distance in classroom.** Desks need to be moved further apart and different forms of seating incorporated into classrooms, including standing desks, bean bag chairs, and tables for small (well-distanced) groups.

10. **Daily temperature checks.** Infrared thermometers should be used to check students, faculty, and other workers' temperatures upon entry to school buildings.

11. **Self-cleaning surfaces.** Nano-technology-enabled self-cleaning surfaces, such as Nanoseptic, can be used on elevator buttons, door handles, light switches, and other places that are constantly touched.

12. **Encourage stair use.** Elevators should be limited to 1 to 5 passengers, depending on their size. Stair use should be encouraged wherever possible.

13. **Wipe down playground equipment.** Indoor and outdoor playground equipment and toys must be wiped down with germicides regularly.

14. **Reduce class sizes.** This can be done by staggered school days, with half the class meeting on Monday and Wednesday and the other half on Tuesday and Thursday, with half days on Fridays while the other half stays home and joins by video conference. Think about starting the school year one to two weeks earlier and ending one to two weeks later to make up for the lost time.

15. **Zero-tolerance for illness.** At the slightest cough, runny nose or fever, children must be picked up immediately and taken home.

16. **No rugs.** Rugs are germ colonies. Carpeting and area rugs should be removed to allow for better sanitation.

17. **Sports and teams.** All contact sports such as basketball, soccer, volleyball, football and gymnastics should be permanently suspended. Some sports like tennis, track, baseball and swim and golf can take place with strict social distancing.

18. **Vaccinations.** Health records should be made a part of enrollment, and all vaccinations must be up to date.

19. **Bus service.** All students living close enough, should be encouraged to walk to school with drivers serving as cross walk guards. Students who still need to be driven should start a car pool plan for drop off and pick up with all passengers wearing masks.

20. **Encourage good health overall.** We know that the majority of those who are hit hard by Covid-19 had underlying conditions. If there were ever a time to get healthy, it is now. Encourage a healthy life style through diet and exercise.

21. **Testing and Monitoring.** Start to research a comprehensive, coordinated approach to testing and monitoring and to ensure we have sufficient resources to reach these goals. Good data is essential, to identify and isolate specific cases of COVID-19, alert their contacts, and monitor infection rates and potential hotspots. Schools can play a part in this by sharing their information.

22. **Have a plan.** If a hotspot is identified in or near the school, the school must be prepared with a plan to close down and move online immediately.

While physical health is important so is mental health so make sure to celebrate often. People and especially children are social creatures and need to build community. Lifecycle events like birthdays should be celebrated in small groups; larger events like graduations and school performances should be spread across multiple days with staggered times so there are less participants and they can be seen by smaller audiences.

