

COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry

Adapted from:

American Academy of Pediatrics

Purpose of Guidance

- The purpose of this guidance is to support education, public health, local leadership, and pediatricians collaborating with schools in creating policies for school re-entry that foster the overall health of children, adolescents, staff, and communities based on available evidence.

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- **Schools are fundamental to child development and well-being and provide our children with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/speech and mental health therapy, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits.**

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- **Beyond supporting the educational development of children, schools play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity. As such, it is critical to reflect on the differential impact COVID-19 and the associated school closures have had on different races, ethnic and vulnerable populations.**

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

- **School policies must be flexible in responding to new information, and administrators must be willing to refine approaches when specific policies are not working.**

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

- **It is critically important to develop strategies that can be revised and adapted depending on the level of viral transmission in the school and throughout the community and done with close communication with state and/or local public health authorities and recognizing the differences between school districts, including urban, suburban, and rural districts.**

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

Special considerations and accommodations to account for the diversity of youth should be made, especially for our vulnerable populations, including those who have disabilities, are medically fragile, live in poverty, have developmental challenges, or have special health care needs with the goal of safe return to school.

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

- **No child should be excluded from school unless required in order to adhere to local public health mandates or because of unique medical needs. Pediatricians, families, and schools should partner together to collaboratively identify and develop accommodations, when needed.**

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

- **School policies should be guided by supporting the overall health and well-being of all children, adolescents, their families, and their communities.**

Any school re-entry policies should consider the following key principles:

- **The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020.**

American Academy of Pediatrics Conclusions:

- **Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation.**

American Academy of Pediatrics Conclusions:

- **Evidence indicates that children and adolescents are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe disease resulting from COVID 19 infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection.**

American Academy of Pediatrics Conclusions:

- **Policies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within schools must be balanced with the known harms to children, adolescents, families, and the community by keeping children at home.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics STRONGLY ADVOCATES:

- **all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.**

Guiding Questions for the Board to Consider

- 1. PL 142 and all subsequent IDEA legislation require that students with disabilities be given an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment
 - Can the Board assure parents of children with disabilities that their student's procedural safeguards will be met in the hybrid option?
 - Can the Board assure parents that the procedural safeguards will be met in the distance learning option?

Guiding Questions for the Board to Consider

- If the Board chooses to not follow the local Health Officer's guidance on using the hybrid model, under what conditions would the Board say that schools could reopen?
- Zero cases in the county?
- When a vaccine has been approved and made available?
- When there is herd immunity?
- Whose guidance will the Board follow?