



## Safe Reopening of Schools

The Wisconsin Education Association Council has the safety of our students, staff, and communities at the top of our minds as school districts begin planning for our school systems for the coming year. With the COVID-19 crisis, we all have many questions and concerns to address, and we urge collaboration with administrators, unions/education associations, and other community stakeholders in the creation of a local plan which supports all students. The current circumstances require that local school districts develop a comprehensive plan which balances the educational goals with families' health and economic, and social realities. With such large decisions, it is imperative that administrators, school board members, and other system leaders adopt a decision-making approach that includes the voices and experience from multiple stakeholders. It is equally important to make sure communication of the re-opening plan and follow-up is clear, concise, timely, and distributed in ways that all students and their families, school staff, and the community have access to see it.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated the glaring equity issues that have always existed in both communities and education. In order to truly address safety, wellness, and learning, equity for all must be centered in every single decision that is made at every level. This means explicitly planning to address support for students with disabilities and at an increased health risk. This means explicitly finding ways to maintain engagement and support for students' whose learning is most at risk. This means explicitly exploring how school districts can address rising xenophobia, implicit bias, racism, confusion and fear in the wake of this crisis. This document offers specific equity considerations embedded in each section. Education must rise to the challenge of addressing inequities in communities and learning.

A primary concern is funding. Because of the inevitable stress on state budgets based on economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative that federal and state governments take action to ensure that school systems have the resources required to meet students' needs in the months to come. Administrators, school boards, and local unions/education associations must collaborate to advocate for necessary federal and state funding. They should also collaborate over difficult decisions a funding crisis may create.

*This document is meant to be a guide, and certainly not all-inclusive, to use when working with your District and school administration when plans to re-open schools are being considered.*

Main areas of focus include:

1. [Safety for Students and Workforce](#)
2. [Preparing for Learning and Social/Emotional Wellness](#)
3. [Policy Responses](#)

## **Safety for Students and Workforce**

Student and staff health and safety must be the top priority based on guidance from medical experts. The school district shall:

- Ensure that reliable, widespread COVID-19 testing and effective tracing measures are in place
- Follow social distancing measures on the school grounds and in related facilities that are considering re-opening for face-to face learning
- Assess the different safety needs in all curricular areas and review guidance from their respective state and national organizations
- Provide appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Develop Sanitation Procedures Including:
  - Hand sanitizing stations & adequate supplies for hand washing
  - School District provided cleaning supplies for all staff
  - Regular Sanitization protocol for common areas (Bathrooms, Lunchrooms/cafeterias, gyms, etc.)
- Ensure appropriate ventilation and air exchange measures are in place

### **Equity Considerations**

Equity needs to be addressed in providing for the safety and wellness of students and the workforce. Considerations that must be made in this vein include but are not limited to:

- Providing appropriate and sanitary transportation for students whose families cannot provide transportation to school
- Gathering data about and taking necessary precautions to protect students who may have allergies to cleaning materials used in learning environments
- Developing contingency plans for students and staff who may be unable to utilize or have access to PPE

## **Preparing for Learning and Social/Emotional Wellness**

Each curricular area has differing needs. Ensuring success in preparing for learning and social/emotional wellness is dependent upon the school district involving all stakeholders including educators, support professionals, parents, guardians, students, and all other school personnel in preparing for learning and social/emotional wellness.

- Use Staff Input to Develop Plans for the Reopening of School including developing multiple school schedules: Face to Face, Blended, and Virtual
- Recognize that a comprehensive approach to education includes all curricular areas to instill a love for learning and stimulate every child's curiosity
- Provide Meaningful, Relevant, and Differentiated Professional Development to meet needs of all staff
- Set aside time before focus on instruction begins to address the following for students and staff:
  - Time to grieve, heal, re-connect, and strengthen the in-school community
  - Develop and implement best practices In Learning Management Systems aligned for grade levels, content areas, and schools
  - Need for assistance to students, parents, and legal guardians in understanding Learning Management Systems (LMS) and procedures
- Expand access to mental health supports for students and staff

### **Equity Considerations**

This crisis has exposed that in order to better address equity concerns, schools need to drastically change how they operate; even if the virus itself becomes less of a risk, it is not

acceptable to return to the Pre-COVID 19 status quo. Considerations include but are not limited to:

- All families in the district, regardless of whether or not we are in a virtual learning environment need access to the internet and wireless technology
- More students are now working to support their families due to COVID related income loss
- Unstable home environments and food insecurity adversely impact learning now more than ever
- Varying degrees of learning loss must explicitly and flexibly be addressed in curricula moving forward

### **Policy Responses**

Some policies will be dictated by State and/or National policy, but Districts can ensure that locally controlled policies are sensitive to the needs of our students and staff in an ever-changing situation. Now is not the time to punish those who cannot work or learn in an environment that compromises their health. We must show courage, creativity, and flexibility in finding ways to support all of our staff and students.

- Create collaborative teams regarding funding decisions that include the District, affected staff representatives, and union leadership
- Address medical concerns in equitably responsive ways, from covering staff medical expenses for testing and vaccinations, to creating policies that are in line with the amount of additional time required when a student or staff member must be quarantined for being exposed to, or contracting COVID-19
- Design policies to cover safety measures that are enforceable (i.e. wearing of PPE, sanitizing procedures, etc.), including ensuring students and staff members feel safe in reporting those who do not comply
- Consider options for childcare and wrap-around care which affect the school staff and the community using a collaborative process including parents/guardians, youth organizations, child-care programs, surrounding school districts, and other affected stakeholders
- Create retirement incentives like flexible reporting deadlines and early retirement for staff who wish to explore options prior to the 2020/2021 school year to ensure a stable workforce and continuity for all students
- Extend the 2019-2020 Waivers for Standardized Testing and Educator Effectiveness leniency recommendation
- Compensate all professional development outside of contracted time, including the cost of the professional development opportunity (conference, webinar, class), and the time the staff member takes to complete it

### **Equity Considerations**

An equitable and safe working environment for staff ensures an optimal learning environment for students. Considerations that must be made in this vein include but are not limited to:

- Create provisions in handbooks that explicitly state that medically vulnerable staff cannot be discriminated against and are allowed necessary protections
- Ensure that all students with Individualized Education Plans have their needs met no matter the learning environment nor the cost