



PSEA Education Services Division

## ...IN BRIEF

June 25, 2020

# State Education Associations Release “Pennsylvania School Reopening Task Force Report”

In spring 2020, eight statewide education associations joined together to create the Pennsylvania School Reopening Task Force. PSEA is a member of the group, which also includes the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU), the Pennsylvania Principals Association, the Pennsylvania Association of Career & Technical Administrators (PACTA), and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS).

The purpose of the task force was to consider issues, challenges, and possible responses related to reopening public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in the Task Force compiled their insights into the [Pennsylvania School Reopening Task Force Report](#). Although local planning must be based upon local conditions, orders from the Governor, recommendations from health officials, and guidance from the state and federal Department of Education, the report provides suggestions that may help local education agencies meet state and federal requirements and develop their mandatory Health and Safety Plans for submission to the PA Department of Education prior to reopening for the 2020-21 school year.

Some ideas contained in this report may require negotiations between employers and local associations if school entities choose to implement them. In addition, because it was produced as a collaborative effort among the associations, individual participating associations and their members may not support every idea included in the report. Since school entities may or may not choose to implement these ideas and since implementation will naturally vary among school entities, PSEA and other associations and their members will monitor their implementation at the school entity level and take positions on final policies as circumstances require.”

The *Task Force Report* is organized into ten topical areas, each of which provide specific ideas related to the challenges school districts may face in reopening. In addition, the report provides links to additional resources where applicable. The ten topical areas addressed in the report are listed below.

- **Communications and Outreach.** The report describes several ideas for communicating within the school community, with the larger community, and with legislators and policymakers.
- **Community Needs.** This section of the report outlines reopening-related considerations for meeting the needs of students from vulnerable families. This includes families who do not have adequate access to childcare or technology, those who speak a primary language other than English, families who may have food or housing insecurity, and those that school entities have been unable to contact during pandemic-related school closure.
- **Extracurricular and Co-curricular Activities.** This section reviews the potential impact of school reopening-related health and safety planning on extracurricular and co-curricular athletics and activities.

Suggestions address the potential needs of student and staff participants as well as spectators and other attendees.

- **Facilities and Logistics.** Maintaining clean and safe facilities is of utmost importance during the pandemic. This section of the report focuses on issues related to physical facilities; buildings and grounds including cleaning, disinfecting and maintaining clean schools; use of personal protective equipment; ventilation and air filtration issues; and student movement challenges including arrival and dismissal procedures, safe use of stairways, use of instructional space, and scheduling issues including lunch.
- **Health and Safety.** The Task Force encourages school entities to collaborate with local health agencies to develop policies and procedures in student and staff health screening; contact tracing; hygiene education and protocols including hand washing and the use of masks; social distancing protocols; supports for high-risk students and staff; isolation and school readmission practices; and programs to support mental, social, and emotional health.
- **Instruction.** Task Force participants examined a broad range of reopening issues related to instruction, assessment, technology, equity, family engagement, staffing, professional development, social distancing, and business functions. The report offers suggestions based on research-based, best practices instructional models and incorporates the on-stage components of the Danielson model. Finally, the authors of this section acknowledge that when school buildings closed, educators quickly experimented with and adapted to new tools, techniques and roles and created organic professional learning and collaboration tactics. The authors assert that this innovative spirit should be preserved.
- **Special Education.** Special education compliance has been an acute concern for education entities during pandemic-related school closures. This section provides suggestions in several complex areas of special education including assessment, transition services, parent relations and communications, addressing backlogs of evaluations and re-evaluations, writing IEPs, least restrictive environment, specially designed instruction, progress monitoring, use of paraprofessionals and aides, and students with complex needs and medically fragile students.
- **Staffing and Personnel.** The report includes suggestions for addressing changes in the workday schedule, staff scheduling and assignments, staff training needs, staff evaluations, and orientation for new staff.
- **Resources** (both purchasing and staff training). The report lists a wide range of PPE that schools may require to operate safely. In addition, several training topics for specific staff categories are listed for school entities to consider.
- **Transportation.** The report suggests several interventions related to transportation scheduling, ridership, and safety protocols. This includes information about social distancing practices on transportation, screening and contact tracing for individuals using school transportation, agreements with transportation contractors, cleaning and disinfection of vehicles, and multiple issues related to transporting students with disabilities in a safe manner.

The report also lists several resources to help schools plan for reopening.

Finally, the report lists several state policy changes that would help local education agencies resume some in-person instruction and meet the needs of all students during the pandemic. State policy recommendations include providing additional flexibility in attendance and truancy requirements, graduation requirements, 180-day school requirement, components of the educator evaluation system, and state assessment requirements for the 2020-21 school year. In addition, the report reflects education associations' desire for additional clarity from PDE about flexible instructional days, potential class size restrictions, and other areas of policy that will require clarification in the coming school year.

For additional information about the contents of the Pennsylvania School Reopening Task Force Report and PSEA's role in creating the report, PSEA members can reach out to PSEA's Education Services Department: [professionallearning@psea.org](mailto:professionallearning@psea.org).