



Revised July 6, 2020

## PA Department of Education Issues Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools

The PA Department of Education (PDE) has issued [preliminary guidance](#) to help local education agencies (LEAs)—including school districts, charter schools, career and technical centers, and intermediate units—plan for a phased reopening of Pennsylvania’s public schools and return to in-person provision of instruction and other services. The guidance includes required steps in the planning and re-opening process that are tied to the Governor’s three reopening phases: Red, Yellow, and Green. In addition, the guidance includes a mandatory template that LEAs must use to submit their Health and Safety Plans (Plan) to PDE.

### Options for the Provision of Instruction in the 2020-21 School Year

PDE requires each LEA to select one of four options to deliver planned instruction in 2020-21:

- **Total reopen for all students and staff** (recognizing that some families may continue to opt for distance learning). This option is available to LEAs in Yellow or Green Phase counties.
- **Scaffolded reopen** in which some students are engaged in in-person learning and others in distance learning (i.e. providing instruction to some grade levels in-person and others remotely). This option is available to LEAs in Yellow or Green Phase counties.
- **Blended reopen** that provides in-person and remote learning for all students (i.e. alternating days or weeks in school). This option is available to LEAs in Yellow or Green Phase counties.
- **Remote learning** for all students. An LEA that selects this option also should develop action steps and define conditions to move to in-person learning. Remote learning is required for any LEA in a Red Phase county.

### Requirements for the LEA Health and Safety Plan

Each LEA must develop and submit a Health and Safety Plan to PDE that reflects the option selected to deliver planned instruction and demonstrates how the LEA will meet several criteria for reopening within the selected option. The Plan should reflect the unique needs of the LEA and be developed in consultation with local health agencies. In addition, each LEA must describe in their Plan how it will respond to changes from Green to Yellow to Red Phase during the school year. Prior to reopening, the Plan must be approved by the school board, posted on the LEA’s website, and submitted to PDE in the provided template provided. The Plan template and requirements are based upon information from the PA Department of Health, PA Department of Education, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Each LEA’s Health and Safety Plan must include specific information as described below:

1. **Designation of a “Pandemic Coordinator” and/or “Pandemic Team.”** Each LEA must designate an individual or team to lead preparedness and response planning around public health and safety. PDE encourages LEAs to develop teams that include administrators, educators, support staff, family representatives, students, community health officials and other external partners. The coordinator and/or team must facilitate the local planning process, monitor implementation of the Plan, and monitor local health data to consider adjustments to the Plan during the school year. In addition, the

team should develop appropriate interventions if an individual associated with the LEA contracts COVID-19.

2. **Protections for High-Risk Individuals.** The Plan must include strategies to protect students and staff who are at higher risk of infection or complications from COVID-19 including distance-learning option for students and families with safety concerns. To accomplish this, PDE recommends that LEAs follow guidance available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [People Who Need to Take Extra Precautions](#).
3. **Symptom Monitoring Process.** In Yellow Phase, each LEA must monitor students and staff for symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19. The Plan may include a less intensive process in the Green Phase.
4. **System for Isolation or Quarantine.** Each LEA must develop a system to isolate or quarantine individuals who develop symptoms or demonstrate a history of exposure to the COVID-19 virus.
5. **Procedures for Individuals Returning from Isolation or Quarantine.** LEAs must develop policies addressing the return to school of a student or staff member who was isolated due to symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19.
6. **Hygiene Guidelines.** The LEA must distribute to all students and staff information about appropriate hygiene practices including hand-washing and other recommended practices and ensure that all staff and students follow the appropriate practices. Policies should include restrictions on non-essential visitors and volunteers in school. PDE also recommends that the LEA limit sharing among students.
7. **Guidance on Face Coverings.** All Plans must reflect the Secretary of Health's order requiring universal face coverings. This order applies to individuals gathered in public indoor congregate settings such as schools. Limited exceptions to this order include for children under the age of 2, for individuals with a health condition that impedes breathing, and for individuals communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or has another disability where viewing the mouth is essential for communication.
8. **Posted Information.** The Plan must include procedures to post highly-visible signs to promote protective measures against the virus. PDE recommends the information available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's webpage, [COVID-19 Print Resources](#).
9. **Sanitization Procedures.** The Plan must include procedures to clean, sanitize, disinfect, and ventilate all areas used by students, including strategies to procure adequate cleaning supplies and clean and disinfect buildings throughout the school day.
10. **Separation of Learning Spaces and Other Social Distancing Practices.** LEAs should ensure learning spaces and transportation allow 6 feet of separation among students and staff to the maximum extent feasible.
11. **Plans for Congregate Settings.** In Yellow Phase, LEAs must restrict the use of congregate settings such as cafeterias and use alternate smaller settings. In Green Phase, the Plan may include guidelines for safe use of congregate settings.
12. **Athletic Activity Protocols.** LEAs must create protocols for activities such as recess and physical education class consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Considerations for Youth Sports](#).
13. **Staff Training Schedule.** The Plan must include a schedule to train all staff on implementing the Health and Safety Plan. The schedule also may include training for educators to implement new instructional strategies and use new distance learning applications.<sup>1</sup>
14. **Communications Plan.** LEAs must have a system to communicate with families around the Plan including ways for families to practice safe hygiene at home. PDE recommends that LEAs be mindful of the need for communication in non-English languages and to all caregivers. LEAs also should

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<sup>1</sup> To view professional learning courses offered by PSEA to help educators respond to the specific needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit [PSEA's Center for Professional Learning](#).

maintain ongoing communication with local and state authorities to determine current mitigation levels in the community.

### **Issue to Consider**

***Local Contract Requirements and Worker Protections.*** Plans to return to work must ensure that employees are safe and also cannot conflict with collective bargaining agreements. It may be necessary to develop Memoranda of Understanding to govern issues that are specific to working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees with specific health-related risk factors may discuss their concerns with their local union leaders or UniServ Representatives.

***Training on Issues other than Health and Safety.*** PDE requires LEAs to submit a plan to train staff to implement the Health and Safety Plan. In addition to this training, however, employees may need training on topics such as appropriate instructional strategies in new learning models and evidence-based approaches to meet social and emotional needs of students after six or more months of isolation. Employees who believe their professional learning needs are not being met may discuss these concerns with their local union leaders or UniServ Representatives

***School Districts in More Than One County.*** PDE's Guidance asks LEAs to plan for instruction according to the Reopening Phase of the county in which the LEA is located. Several LEAs cross county lines, however. LEAs that educate students from more than one county should develop additional plans and protocols to determine how instruction will be delivered if the counties served by the LEA are not in the same phase of reopening.

**For Additional Information or Support.** For more information about your employer's Health and Safety Plan, PSEA members should speak with their local union leadership or contact their UniServ Representative. PSEA members with concerns about reopening requirements also should contact their UniServ Representative. For general information about PDE's COVID-19 response, contact PSEA's Education Services Department at [professionallearning@psea.org](mailto:professionallearning@psea.org).