Introduction

This document from the DC State Board of Education (SBOE) compiles and synthesizes considerations for reopening DC public schools. The document is based on input from a range of educational stakeholders, organizations, and agencies, including:

- Constituent emails to members of the DC State Board of Education
- Public testimony received during the State Board's June 17 public meeting
- Testimony from Dr. Lewis Ferebee to the DC State Board of Education on July 1, 2020
- DC State Board of Education (SBOE) Responses to #ReOpenDC Questions (dated June 23, 2020)
- Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) School Health and Safety Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19 Recovery Period (dated July 6, 2020)
- DC Deputy Mayor for Education's (DME) Public School Family Engagement Survey Results (dated June 2020)
- #ReOpenDC Advisory Group Recommendations to Mayor Bowser (dated May 21, 2020)
- District of Columbia Public Schools' (DCPS) Return to In-Person Work Guidelines (dated June 2020)
- The SY2019–20 Student Advisory Committee (SAC) Report
- Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) Parent Impact Survey (dated June 26, 2020)
- The Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) Reopen DC Taskforce Report (dated June 22, 2020)
- Reopening plans from Arlington Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools, Texas Education Agency, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, California Department of Education, School District of Philadelphia, Illinois State Board of Education, and Maryland State Board of Education.
- Harvard University Schools for Health Report
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- National Association of School Nurses (NASN)
- International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS)
- EmpowerEd DC Education Recovery Plan (dated June 2020)

By drawing on these multiple sources of knowledge, representative of the DC education landscape, the considerations highlighted in this resource are intended to enable more equitable, holistic, and informed decision-making. The State Board intends to share these considerations with OSSE, DME, DCPS, charter Local Education Agencies (LEA), and the public as a resource that captures the complexity of the school reopening process, while posing additional, unanswered questions and concerns that parents, students, and educators have shared with the DC State Board of Education.

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Reopening considerations outlined below are organized into the following key themes and sections—each which addresses important and necessary considerations:

   I.   Overall Health Concerns
  II.   Resources and the Essential Personnel for the Reopening Process
III.   Reopening Schools
IV.   Accommodations for Students with Special Needs, Health Issues, Etc.
 V.   State- and School-Level
VI.   Additional Questions

I.   Overall Health Concerns

A. What protections will be in place to ensure teachers, students, staff, and family members are safe?

Clear protocols and precautions must be established at each school to govern the entry and exit of students, parents, community members, guests, and school staff. Teachers and school staff should self-screen for COVID-19 each day before coming to the school campus. This should include taking their own temperature and answering and reporting responses to daily questions that help determine if they are experiencing the common symptoms of COVID-19. If they feel they might have the virus, a fever (regardless of severity), or have positive lab-confirmation of having contracted COVID-19, they must report this information to the school and remain off campus until they meet the criteria for entering the school building. They must also report any close contact with individuals who were lab-confirmed with COVID-19. If so, they should isolate themselves for at least 14-days. No teachers should be penalized for reporting possible COVID-19 infections, or their close contact with those who were confirmed to have had the illness.[i]

Drop-Off and Pick-Up
Parents should remain outside the school during drop-off and pick-up. Unscheduled visitors should not be permitted in the school. Scheduled visitors should be tested at least 48 hours prior to entry and should be screened for temperature before entry. If there is an indication that the visitor may have the virus, then they must remain off campus until they meet the criteria discussed above for entering a school building.

Entry and exit times should also be staggered to minimize crowding at school entrance/exit points. Protocols for individual schools should be developed, in consultation with Local School Advisory Teams (LSAT) and teachers, to govern dismissal that will not require multiple groups of students to come together in common spaces until they are picked up by caregivers.[ii] Temperature checks and touch-free hand sanitizer should be available for all entering school.[iii] Touch-free hand sanitizer should also be available in common areas as well. If possible, a daily entry questionnaire to assess if students and employees are feeling COVID-19 symptoms should be administered.[iv]

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Staff Testing for COVID-19
Before schools reopen, staff should be administered a COVID-19 test by a licensed medical provider and required to test negative for COVID-19 prior to taking part in in-person learning.

In addition to daily self-checks by teachers before they leave their homes for the school, teachers should also be required to be routinely tested at least weekly using the Districts' free testing sites, especially if they feel they have been exposed to the COVID-19 or are showing signs of infection. While not mandatory, teachers and parents should also be encouraged to get tested for COVID-19 anti-bodies once a month, with schools and LEAs providing information on where they can get tested. To attend in-person class, students should have the most current health forms on file at the school.[v]

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks and gloves, should be available and worn when appropriate, and clear guidelines at the school for when teachers and students would wear PPE. If possible, private or vacant spaces can be repurposed during the early stages of reopening to distribute PPE.[vi] Students and teachers should be provided with at least one new mask each day[vii]. To accommodate students who are deaf or hard of hearing, specialized face coverings should be provided to them, as well as their school staff and aids.[viii]

Cleaning and Air-Filtration Systems
Cleaning supplies including soap and touch-free hand sanitizers should always be available to students, and if not, the school should be closed until it is adequately available. All air filters should be changed before the first week of school or based on the manufacturer's recommendation if the air filter is relatively new; any air circulation issues should be addressed and repaired at least a week before schools reopen.[ix] If feasible, schools should install MERV-13 or high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, which are able to scrub recirculated air of virus particles, and/or install UV-C lights in air-handling units that are capable of destroying airborne viruses. HEPA filters are better suited for use in individual classrooms rather than large buildings.[xxi]

Daily cleaning protocols and schedules should be in place to ensure that workplaces, workstations, equipment, and facilities are cleaned multiple times per day and between group use; deep cleaning of campuses should occur once a week[xii]. If feasible, staff should use a vacuum fitted with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to clean areas around the school. Staff should avoid vacuuming rooms when people are present, and temporarily turn off fans and air conditioning in the room to prevent air escaping the vacuum and circulating to other areas of the building. Rooms and areas can be opened and used again once it has been properly cleaned and disinfected. Staff should not have a need to conduct deep disinfection of rooms if they were not in use for more than seven days. All cleaning products used by custodial staff should be out of reach of children and other non-custodial staff.[xiii] All classrooms should have disinfectant cleaning supplies (out of reach of children), extra masks in case of accidents, and touch-free hand sanitizer and/or soap stations.[xiv]

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Within the classroom and common areas used by multiple groups of people, regular cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing surfaces should be conducted between the time one group leaves the area and another group enters. To prevent rodent and insect infestations, rooms should be cleaned daily if food has been present.

Social Distancing Indoors

School buildings and classes must maintain social distancing where feasible, and educators and students should wear masks over their mouth and nose inside the school building, especially when social distancing is not feasible—if neither are feasible, the school should remain closed. Students, parents, and educators should be at least six feet from each other on school premises and avoiding face-to-face interactions and movement between classes. While masks should be a requirement for students in Grade 2 and above, and a requirement for all school staff. Mask breaks should be an available option when students can be six feet apart, ideally in an outside setting. A minimum distance of three feet[xv] between students and staff, if masks and the other measures above are met, should always be maintained. Schools should also designate a COVID-19 isolation space separate from the nurse's office where routine COVID-19-related medical care can be provided.[xvi]

Markings and signs should be displayed on floors and walls at entrance/exit points, elevators, hallways, etc. to help keep six feet social distancing rules. Signs can also be placed around the school, and with permission, office buildings around the school, to remind students, parents, and staff to maintain social distancing, wear masks, and wash hands adequately.[xvii] Seating and desks should provide at least six feet of distance between each other, including educators' furniture. If not, the schools should stay closed and provide distance learning to students. In-person class sizes should also be reduced to maintain social distancing.[xviii]

On-Site School Nurses and Mental Health Professionals
Every school should have at least one full-time nurse and maintain a minimum of ratio of 1:750 nurses per students[xix] and a ratio of 1:1,000 mental health professionals per student[xx], including guidance counselors. The ratios above are recommendations prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and should be adjusted to account for the strain on possible influx of screenings, viral testing, addressing student trauma, and completion of paperwork for school-based staff and students. To save resources, avoid disruptions, or possible outbreaks, students, teachers, and school-based staff showing signs of COVID-19 infection should be tested off school campuses, and use rapid-tests to avoid wait times and further spread of the virus[xxi] [xxii]. Additional mental and health supports should be available to students who are most directly impacted by COVID-19 and its implications to communities.[xxiii] Aside from mental health professionals and guidance counselors, teachers should be equipped to understand and detect trauma in students, and spend time addressing trauma.[xxiv]

Clear protocols, which should be determined by health care staff, need to be in place for students and staff who show signs of illness. If a student is identified as being sick with COVID-19, or suspected of being sick, the school should close off any areas that student came in contact with, and keep these areas closed until it is properly cleaned and disinfected. This

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includes cleaning offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment, etc. The CDC advises waiting at least 24 hours before staff should clean the area, but if this is not feasible, wait as long as possible. To minimize mixing and to better track and contact trace students who may be exposed, student cohorts should be formed.[xxv] It is recommended that individuals who came in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 (meaning two individuals were within 6 feet from each other for more than 15 minutes), or are showing signs of illness from COVID-19, should isolate themselves for 14 days.[xxvi] Further, any school staff exposed to COVID-19 and who isolate themselves for 14 days should not be required to

use sick leave, and should be allowed to continue their work remotely, should their health allow for it.

Substitute Teachers
LEAs should have a wide pool of well-trained substitute teachers available to allow for teachers to safely quarantine. Substitute teachers should not only be trained to the same standards as educators on health and safety policies of the school, but also on the learning platforms utilized by educators. Two recommended ways LEAs can widen the pool of substitute teachers is to increase their compensation and remove any barriers recently retired teachers might encounter if they choose to return to the classroom as a substitute. All substitute teachers should test negative for COVID-19 and be screened by school nurses prior to entering school classrooms.

Other
If teachers or parents have concerns around their personal safety and health, a single hotline should be established for reporting these concerns.[xxvii]

In the case of another spike in COVID-19 cases in the area or circumstances that would make entering school buildings unsafe, clear and transparent protocols need to be in place for all schools. Such protocols must be readily available at the start of the school year and provide for the seamless and immediate transition to full capacity distance learning of students at all grade levels and learning needs for any period of time.[xxviii] [xxix] Clear protocols should also be in place to provide timely communication with school staff and the community at large in the event of a spike in cases or singular cases within the school.[xxx] Local health officials should help to inform the establishment of guidelines around when schools should close in-person lessons and what it should look like.

B. What policies will be put in place to ensure students maintain social distancing and follow school rules around mask wearing?

Early childhood education (ECE) and elementary schools will prove more challenging for maintaining protocols, and strict social distancing guidelines from the CDC may not be possible for all student age groups.

Schools must consider the specific needs, development, and behavior of young students when designing a non-militant protocol to keep students and educators safe. Different expectations

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and schedules should be adopted separately for ECE students, K–2 students, and students in grades 3–5. Young students who may find it difficult to wear a mask should only be required to wear masks in hallways or moving outside of the classroom or in areas of the school where physical distancing is not possible.[xxxi] Consistent scheduling with a full educational experience should be provided to all three grade bands, although the length of time and option of in-person versus distance learning daily instruction might need to vary to limit exposure and crowding of students. In the case of staggered start and end times and a large influx of students learning in-person, LEAs should have additional trained staff on hand—especially for departmentalized grades. Library media specialists and departmentalized educators should be provided with clear expectations and training in order to safely engage with students in in-person settings.[xxxii]

For middle and high school grade bands, students will be much more mobile than ECE and elementary school students; therefore, other considerations should be made. For students who refuse to wear PPE or practice social distancing, they should not be permitted to participate in in-person learning. To maintain social distancing, limit the number of students on campus at any given time. This could mean students come to school on alternating days while participating in hybrid learning. To avoid movement of students, teachers may be the ones to switch to different classrooms. When students are moving throughout the building, signs and barriers should be in place to direct traffic and flow of students.[xxxiii]

Students and parents of any grade band should have the option to participate in distance learning, should they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Students and parents opting for distance learning should be guaranteed equal access to learning opportunities.[xxxiv]

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II.   Resources and Essential Personnel for the Reopening Process

A. How can we ensure all students have equitable access to the internet and devices? How do families/students, who have technology get technical difficulties resolved (i.e., my computer is broken, who do I contact? My Wi-Fi stopped working, who do I contact)? How can we ensure all students have equitable access to the internet and devices?

Every student in the District must have 24/7 access to their own computer, laptop, or tablet, as well as a working high-speed internet connection. Should a student find themselves without a device or internet, the school should check out a school-owned digital devices to them (at no cost)—smartphones are not enough to handle a distance-learning workload.[xxxv] It is the District's responsibility to provide access and/or subsidize broadband, devices, and training to students, parents, and educators who do not have access to digital resources. Any student who lacks a working device or high-speed internet access must not face repercussions or punishment from their school or teachers if they do not have equitable access to technology.[xxxvi] Educators and parents should also be provided training opportunities around the usage and maintenance of digital devices from the District.[xxxvii]

School libraries should host online orientations for students and parents/families to engage in distance learning. These orientation trainings should also be available online for families who have high-speed internet at home, and all in-person training should maintain social distancing. LEAs should also provide training on platforms used within the District and their students' LEA; training can include online etiquette and OSSE's expectations for attendance and assignments.

Should a student, parent, or educator struggle with technology issues, a help center within the LEA should be responsible for addressing hardware, software, or any other technological challenge.[xxxviii][xxxix] These supports should be made available at no cost and in multiple languages. It is recommended that there be clear lines of communication between families/parents, teachers and schools.

B. Will the upcoming school year feature one digital platform, or multiple platforms across LEAs, schools, and classes?

Each LEA, if not all LEA's in the District, should strive for a single digital platform for users to obtain students' work, share assignments, contact and communicate with teachers, obtain recorded video lessons, and join live sessions with teachers through simultaneous learning. This platform should be transparent and be designed to allow students and families to easily access teachers and grades. Further, effective communication with teachers and school administrators should utilize easy-to-use and easy-to-access chatrooms (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom).[xl]

Prior to reopening, LEAs should consult with teachers to determine an appropriate digital platform based on grade bands and courses taught. Following these discussions, LEAs

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should provide training and professional development opportunities to educators to effectively adopt an agreed upon, unified digital platform at the LEA level.[xli] Even if teachers are returning to physical school buildings for in-person lessons, they should be able to switch to digital platforms should the school close due to health concerns.

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III. Reopening Schools

A. What are some of the options LEAs are considering for reopening in SY2020–21 (in-person, distance learning, hybrid)?

There are several scheduling options that LEAs can consider during reopening including:
1) In-person learning with new safety requirements;
2) A hybrid of in-person and remote learning; and
3) A full continuation of fully remote learning.

No matter which form reopening takes, LEAs should submit a plan for all three models, and include supports for special education students.[xlii]

Below are a few recommended options LEAs can take, along with guidance on policies that should be in place across all reopening models:

Schools as open and unstructured learning communities that use their space exclusively for distance learning supports: One novel approach to reopening schools would be to have lessons entirely designed around distance learning, while opening school buildings as physical spaces for students to learn virtually.

- The advantages: This would especially target students of parents/caregivers who will not be able to stay home with them, students who require high-speed internet connection that is not available in their community, services provided by special education staff, or other areas that necessitate traveling to the school. Some teachers and certified adults can come to the school to supervise students and assist them, while all teachers will use synchronous/asynchronous teaching online. Students at the school will participate in online learning just as students who stay home participate in distance learning. This option aligns with students' and teachers' health and safety concerns.[xliii]
- The disadvantages: There is a possibility that too few teachers or other certified, screened staff would feel safe returning to school for the number of students and families that could express interest in this option. Further, those teachers who do return must still find time to provide synchronous/asynchronous lessons while supervising other students. This would take careful planning on the part of LEAs.

Alternating in-person schedules for all students and prioritize every day in-person instruction for high-needs and vulnerable student groups: Should LEAs convene during reopening, they may also consider using a multi-track system, which would have schools divide students into A, B, and C groups, and have students take classes in-person every third day. In this model, special education students, English-language learners, and other vulnerable children like homeless students attend classes in person Monday through Thursday.

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- <u>The advantages:</u> Keeps buildings empty on Fridays allowing for regular, deep cleaning without disruption to teaching and learning; and ensuring that the students who need more in-person instruction can be in schools every day, both of which address a lot of big equity concerns.
- <u>The disadvantages:</u> Teachers may have to develop two different curricula—one for online and one for in-person learning. This might add to the workload of teachers if this is the expectation of the LEA. Also, some families may object to allowing only certain students to attend school daily. Also, this poses a childcare challenge for working parents.[xliv] Further, according to the June 2020 DME Public School Family Engagement Survey families of students with IEPs were slightly less likely to opt for in-person instruction.

Cyclical Lockdown Strategy: School buildings would regularly alternate between being open and closed, with students staying home for a minimum of 10 days during closure periods. Students attend school one full week, followed by two weeks of remote learning at home or students come to school Monday through Thursday, and then learn from home on Friday and all days of the following week.

- <u>The advantages:</u> Research says this schedule would allow the virus to reach peak infectiousness during "at-home" weeks. While symptomatic carriers of the virus can be infectious for longer than 10 days, the symptoms would be detected while people are under lockdown, so they and other members of their household can remain isolated or self-quarantined. It may help limit unscheduled disruptions caused by a positive case or wider outbreak in the community.
- <u>The disadvantages:</u> Students will spend more time in remote learning environments than in school buildings receiving in-person instruction. For working parents with younger children, childcare may be challenging to arrange on such an unconventional schedule.[xlv] Further, according to the June 2020 DME Public School Family Engagement Survey, alternating weeks of school was the least favored option for reopening across all Wards.

According to the DME Public School Family Engagement Survey Results, a schedule with 2 days "on" / 3 days "off" is the most popular schedule on average. It is also popular across wards and family schedule preference trends are very similar across school types. Schedules with alternating days or one week "on" / one week "off" schedules are less popular, ranked in second and third place, respectively. A schedule with two weeks "on" / two weeks "off" was the least favored across elementary through high school. Spanish-speaking respondents more strongly favor the alternating days schedule. There is little variation in schedule preferences between families with and without students with IEPs. Families of students with IEPs are slightly less likely to opt for in-person instruction. Families of students with IEPs in Wards 7 and 8 are more likely to opt for remote or online learning. Above all, families value a consistent schedule every week that allows them to plan their work schedule and for the school to clean.[xlvi]

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Approximately 60 percent of respondents were satisfied with remote learning; access to tech and receiving materials/communications from school were cited as key success factors. Approximately 20 percent of respondents were not satisfied with remote learning; many parents stated their children were unmotivated and they did not have time to support them. Ward 7 and 8 respondents were more satisfied with online learning than respondents in Wards 1–6. Residents of wards with higher rates of COVID-19 infection tend to have a lower likelihood of opting to return to school in-person next year (Wards 5, 7, and 8 show the highest prevalence). For next year, up to approximately 75 percent of students represented in the survey may opt for in-person instruction in the fall. Preference for in-person instruction was strongest for youngest students; preschool and elementary schools expect approximately 50–55 percent uptake, while middle and high schools expect 40 percent uptake. Students from Wards 7 and 8 are less likely to opt for in-person instruction. Qualitatively, families emphasized a desire for choice in online vs. in-person instruction, primarily given health/safety concerns and the evolving situation with COVID-19.[xlvii]

Regionally, Montgomery County is planning on either a full distance-learning model or a hybrid model,[xlviii] where students alternate days in a 4-day week. Wednesdays will be reserved for deep cleaning, teacher planning, and faculty meetings.[xlix] It has not finalized its plans yet. In Arlington County, parents will choose between a fully virtual or hybrid model, with Mondays reserved for deep cleaning, distance learning, and teacher planning. The district chose Mondays rather than a mid-week cleaning day because it coincides with many federal holidays and therefore aligns with other school districts in Northern Virginia.[l] In Fairfax County, schools will conduct in-person learning two-days a week.[li]

Other options to consider: one-day rotation, two-day rotation, A/B week, elementary face-to-face and secondary distance learning, grade band phase-in, learning in outdoor and natural spaces.[lii] [liii]

Whichever option LEAs choose for reopening, they will need to reimagine the staffing of schools in order for the academic and social-emotional needs of students to be met. Teachers will need additional flexibility, planning, and professional supports to meet the needs of students. LEAs should consult with teachers and school staff to develop master schedules and teaching schedules whether they are engaged in in-person or distance learning. The teaching schedules should be developed in such a way that minimizes exposure for teachers and staff to multiple groups of students during in-person learning.[liv]

LEAs must recognize that teachers will need additional time to prepare lessons and to grade assignments in different learning environments, especially for those who are asked to provide instruction in multiple environments simultaneously (i.e., a hybrid in-person, distance learning approach). Class periods should not be extended beyond normal lengths; breaks need to be provided to students and physical exercise should be encouraged. Teachers who are leading distance learning courses should teach no more than 4 hours per day and a break of 15–30 minutes should be provided between classes. Teachers would retain their requirement of 6 hours of "work time" per day (per WTU labor contract agreement) but be provided the flexibility to work with whole groups, small groups, and

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contact families. Teachers who are engaged in distance learning should be given flexibility to meet their students' needs. DCPS and charter LEAs must recognize that teachers will spend additional time communicating with families during periods of distance learning. Staffing plans must distribute workloads equitably and ensure that teacher and staff well-being is considered.[lv]

For some students and grades bands, non-technology supplies, including paper, crayons and other educational supplies will need to be made available to families. Overall, protocols need to be developed for students who are transitioning between in-person and distance environments to ensure attendance, participation, and submission of assignments.[lvi]

In terms of learning, the CDC recommends, where possible, that teachers rather than students move between classes.[lvii] Consider livestreaming class lessons using virtual meeting programs (Zoom, Google Meets, etc.) to provide students in different classrooms or at home with synchronous access to the lesson. Similarly, the synchronous lesson could be recorded and used for asynchronous learning opportunities. Synchronous remote learning should be thoughtfully structured and scheduled at the building/district level to eliminate an overlap in scheduled student meetings to ensure that students are able to actively participate in scheduled courses.[lviii]

Outdoor education has been touted as a healthy, stress reducing alternative to a number of logistical issues involved in indoor learning (e.g., class size and space, the spread of the COVID-19, etc.). The key idea is that LEAs would identify outdoor spaces that are safe, equitable across the District, secure, and clean. In order to ensure all schools across the district have ample space for its students, LEAs may be able to partner with the DC Mayor's Office to leverage the surrounding spaces, when feasible—closing streets, allowing the use of public parks, opening parking lot spaces to teachers and students, and other spaces that are safe and secure may options for schools. Since weather will hamper continuous learning outside, LEAs should have a plan in place—for example, having a back-up space in the school building that allows for safe social distancing and learning, or if it is known in advance that weather will not permit outside learning, switching to distance learning. Lastly, Denmark, like other countries, are phasing in different grade bands of students on school campuses; they are starting with the youngest students, since they cannot stay home alone, and technology is less effective on their learning and development compared to middle or high school students. Parents or caregivers of students should be considered as potential partners in outdoor learning, depending on the age-appropriate ability levels of students and lesson complexity.[lix] [lx]

School breaks, or stretches of weeks of distance learning, is another recommendation that aligns with outdoor learning while anticipating cold weather, flu season, and a likely jump in COVID-19 cases. LEAs should decide on a window of time that students would learn remotely to avoid the spread of the virus and force indoor learning. EmpowerEd recommends closing schools two weeks before Thanksgiving and returning in January, pending infection rate data in the District and an evaluation of cases documented during fall reopening.[lxi]

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District families have clear recommendations for making improvements with distance learning. They suggest building in more student-to-student interaction, more teacher touch points, synchronous learning, social engagement, simplifying learning platforms and log-in processes, continuing to streamline schedules, and targeted feedback on student performance as places for growth.[lxii]

The State Board of Education's Student Advisory Committee (SAC) had several suggestions for the learning process, specifically for high school grade bands. A flexible balance of synchronous and asynchronous forms of learning should be encouraged. They encourage optional live sessions (synchronous learning) mostly for review and Q&A with teachers, as well as to create a more interactive learning environment. Students like the ability to ask their teachers questions in real time, face-to-face or voice-to-voice, for thorough and detailed explanations of content. Synchronous learning in small interactive groups can be effective at encouraging students to complete work. However, many SAC members shared their own concerns with an over-reliance on synchronous learning because the time spent on these calls can hinder students' ability to complete their graded work. Thus, they encourage pre-recorded instructional videos for teachers to use for lessons, as this type of learning allows students to pause, rewind, and resume at the students' preference.

LEAs should ensure that teachers provide students realistic weekly suggested schedules for completing daily work in each class, and that teachers coordinate with each other on expected workloads for students. The SAC recommends a uniform approach of distributing work to students and turning in work to teachers across each LEA, or all LEAs if feasible. Across LEAs, there should be one consistent and repeatable approach toward what day assignments are distributed each week and on what day they are supposed to be submitted each week. This would curtail sporadic and random work distribution which is detrimental to retaining information. The previously mentioned digital platform used in each school should be able to have teachers return grades in real time for students to easily and readily access if such a system is not already in place.

Regarding grades, students recognize the importance of displaying mastery of content and understand individual grades reflect their mastery of content; however, the SAC encourages teachers and schools to recognize the unprecedented difficulty of learning during this time and encourages teachers and schools to take this difficulty into account when issuing grades. This could look like: limited yet flexible use of extra credit, optional assignments, and assignments that can only improve grades; appropriate grading curves for weighty assignments; and teachers grading with discretionary-leniency on completion assignments and project-based assignments on the basis of effort and noticeable hard work.[lxiii]

C. How will the District safely transport students to and from school?

To avoid crowding and exposure to COVID-19 on public transportation for teachers and students, schools should consider non-traditional school hours. If feasible, LEAs should

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coordinate their revised hours with each other, as well as other school jurisdictions, for educators who require educational options for their own children. The Daytime School Parking Zone Act should also be expanded to ensure that all schools have adequate parking spaces for all staff.[lxiv] Where appropriate, masks must also be worn by all students using public transportation as a preventative measure. For bus transportation, seats should be marked to indicate safe social distances, fewer students should enter the bus at a single time, and bus stops should be consolidated to alleviate the increased trips bus drivers are taking to drop students off.[lxv]

LEAs should maintain communication with WMATA before schools reopen and during the process of reopening to ensure there are appropriate protocols for students to get to and from school. LEAs should also communicate with each school community on safe passage efforts, including ride-share services to and from school.[lxvi]

D. **What will training around virtual/distance learning, health and safety precautions look like for educators, principals, and other school-based staff?**

Given the likely possibility of rolling closures in school year 2020–21, LEAs should offer high-quality professional development focused on best practices around distance learning for all school leaders, teachers, and school-based staff.[lxvii] Digital training prior to reopening in August should center around teaching and leading in any new school models, health (including mental health and childhood trauma) and safety procedures, new pedagogical approaches, and the use of digital platforms. Training centered around teachers should also prepare them for pedagogical and coaching strategies as they relate to virtual environments. Schools should be prepared to welcome new teachers and school staff by modifying orientation programs, while being mindful of the new education landscape—the possibility of distance learning, fewer experiences working face-to-face with students, remote mentoring/coaching from veteran teachers.

E. **What arrangements can be made to accommodate teachers who cannot find childcare for their own children, or have children who are on different school schedules as DCPS?**

Prior to reopening, schools should explore community partnerships that could provide childcare for teachers or allow teachers to work from home without penalty should they feel uncomfortable sending their own children to childcare centers or school.[lxviii]

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IV. Accommodations for students with special needs, health issues, etc.

A. What accommodations will be made available to children who have IEPs, 504 plans, or pre-existing medical conditions?

Schools will need to consider the range of needs of students, developing clear protocols, specialized services, and additional instruction to students based on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). IEPs should be provided for in-person instruction, for distance learning, or a hybrid option.[lxix] LEAs should consider the recent results of the DME Public School Family Engagement Survey, which suggests that families of students with IEPs were slightly less likely to opt for in-person instruction. Families of students with IEPs in Wards 7 and 8 were more likely to opt for remote or online learning.

Clear protocols need to be in place for students who have IEPs that require physical prompting and/or have sensory issues, such as playing or spitting their saliva to satisfy sensory needs. Students who are dependent on educators, requiring significant physical aid from school staff around daily living skills (e.g., eating food, using the bathroom, etc.), should be encouraged to participate in distance learning for the entire school year, or at least the first few months of reopening, and a phased approach should be taken for their safe reentry back into schools. Students who are able to do tasks independently (e.g., able to keep a mask on, wash their hands, go to the bathroom unassisted) should be given the option of in-person learning.[lxx]

IEP teams, especially those who are serving students who are dependent on educators and require significant physical aid, should meet prior to schools reopening in the fall, and include the student's parents, school staff who will be responsible for providing medical care to the student, and other related service staff (e.g., school nurse, 1:1 nurse, paraeducator), to consider the best course of action in terms of in-person learning, facilities available at the school, etc. If feasible, LEAs may request permission from parents to maintain two-way communication with a medically fragile student's physician to discuss student-specific needs and safety considerations in the school context.[lxxi lxxii]

To ensure the safety and health of educators and students, as well as a quality education, LEAs must ensure that special education teachers do not receive caseloads that exceed standards negotiated with the Washington Teachers' Union, and special education teachers are not taking on additional responsibilities that interfere with their ability to provide services to students in their caseloads.[lxxiii]

For students who will be engaged with distance learning, LEAs should provide students with opportunities that would allow them to work at their own pace, modified for their individual needs. Materials provided to students should be aligned with the learning standards, and should be provided as printed packets, online assignments, and synchronous/asynchronous lessons. Students should also have access to teachers during school hours to provide them with support or feedback.[lxxiv]

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It is also important for any students who are homebound and participating in distance learning to have the ability to engage with other classmates remotely. LEAs must have a system in place to track students' progress, services provided (including IEP hours, evaluations, and other services), and ensure students have the technical support needed to complete assignments. Further, to avoid overwhelming teachers with multiple ways to document hours, LEAs should develop a data system and protocol to allow for digital signatures.[lxxv] [lxxvi]

Schools should collaborate with parents of homebound students on the best times for teachers to work with them. In the classroom, LEAs must have protocols in place for teachers to properly respond to students who require restraints due to unsafe behaviors, or physical comfort to students experiencing a meltdown. These protocols should reflect input from educators.[lxxvii]

Schools should provide flexibility and accommodations to educators to help them manage their workload, as well as professional development on distance learning. This should include providing educators with additional time for planning and filling out paperwork, allowing teachers to meet with students outside of traditional hours, and conducting assessment and programming, including IEP evaluations remotely where appropriate. LEAs should consult with educators to help develop metrics for the evaluation of special education teachers who are teaching either inside the classroom or remotely.[lxxviii]

B. **How will the school make classrooms accessible and safe while accommodating for students, aides, and health equipment under special circumstances?**

LEAs should consider altered class size/structure for self-contained programs, and modified staffing for specific programs. Classrooms designed for cooperative educational services (CES), behavior and education support (BES), independent living skills (ILS), and medically fragile students should reduce the number of students below the 8–10 student limit. It is recommended that schools aim for at most 50 percent capacity of students per classroom to take into account the safety and health of school staff and students, with an adequate student-to-teacher ratio that allows for adequate safety precautions such as washing breaks that require movement and transition out of the classroom. Ideally, there should be at least one dedicated staff for every one or two students in the room to minimize contacts during bathroom breaks, eating meals, and other activities.[lxxix]

1. **What will be the staffing requirements for students with special needs or medically fragile students?**

   Schools should provide nurses dedicated time to meet with individual teachers and staff members prior to the school reopening to review health concerns for medically fragile students who will be coming to the school in person. The aim is to ensure students will receive immediate health-related treatment (e.g., asthma action plans, allergy protocols, diabetes care plans, and other emergency action plans for conditions that are compounded by chronic medical conditions).[lxxx]

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V.   State- and School-Level Policy

A.   What autonomy will educators and schools have in terms of performing their job responsibilities?

Teachers who are at high-risk or live with someone who are at high-risk for developing severe complications from COVID-19 must be given the option to teach remotely using synchronous/asynchronous distance learning instruction, and opt-out of any in-person lessons with students.[lxxxi] School staff should consult with their healthcare providers about the feasibility of returning to the school while being able to keep themselves and those they live with safe from COVID-19 infection.[lxxxii] School staff, including counselors, librarians, and others who work in the school should not be penalized for their inability to teach in-person.

For teachers asked to return to the school for in-person learning, several considerations and accommodations should be made. School staff who return to the school for in-person instruction at the school during Phase 1 through 3 of the recovery process should be provided with hazard pay.[lxxxiii] Flexible work hours should be provided by schools to support social distancing, including staggered hours or specific days the educator is on the school site. For teachers with their own children who are young or attending grade school, flexible schedules should also be provided to meet the needs of their families. It is recommended that there is cross-sector collaboration in the District to ensure the coordination of school schedules in order to minimize conflicts.[lxxxiv]

1.   Can teachers who prefer to stay virtual-only be placed in virtual-only positions, or will they be mandated to use leave (i.e. FMLA)?

No, teachers should not be required to use leave time (e.g., FMLA) if they are at high-risk, or their family members/individuals they are living with are at-high risk, such that they are fully able to teach and perform duties remotely.

B.   How do schools plan on addressing existing achievement and learning gaps, as well as learning loss that COVID-19 only served to exacerbate?

LEAs should gather feedback and requests from students and families during the initial spring 2020 school closures to inform the content and materials needed for reopening in the fall. LEAs should also use formative assessments around student mastery and learning during distance learning in spring to inform efforts in the summer and the 2021 school year.[lxxxv]

Time should be allotted at the beginning of the school year to assess academic regression for students, especially for students disadvantaged on the basis of socioeconomic status and access to technology. OSSE should consult with teachers to assess the appropriate time needed to identify and address learning loss and achievement gaps in general. Teachers

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should also have the flexibility to teach at their own pace to best meet the unique social and academic needs of their students.[lxxxvi]

C. Will schools be administering high-stakes testing and teacher evaluations (e.g., IMPACT) in SY2020–21?

High stakes testing and evaluations should be postponed until at least one year after the District enters Stage 4 of the recovery.[lxxxvii]

VI. Additional Questions

A. Will all students get a rapid test before school starts?
B. If classes are conducted outdoors, what accommodations will be available to students who have audio/visual difficulties?
C. How will attendance be tracked during various reopen scenarios?
D. How will the statewide accountability framework be implemented in the next year?
E. How will PPE and other necessary items be purchased for schools? With what funding source? Who will be responsible for distribution and procurement of needed items?
F. How will substitute teachers be screened and monitored?
G. How will community service requirements be completed?
H. Do families who begin the year home schooling through the OSSE notification of intent process need to submit health verification prior to reentering school?
I. Will vaccine requirement be adjusted?
J. How will families and communities be notified in the event of exposure to coronavirus through a school?
K. How will LEAs identify and eliminate barriers to effectively engaging students in extended distance learning periods?
L. What is the guidance for student discipline related to violations of safety protocals at a school?
M. Are additional supports being provided to students who graduated? Is the District tracking outcomes for those students?
N. What protocols are being designed to screen students that arrive after the beginning of the school year? Will there be a quarantine period?
O. What metrics would necessitate the closure of schools once they have been reopened?
P. What supports will be provided to hourly workers if school does not open with a full in-person week?
Q. What are the cleaning protocols for school buildings? Who will train custodial staff? Is the current custodial staff sufficiently trained and supplied with resources to ensure protocols are followed?
R. What coordination efforts are underway with surrounding jurisdictions for reporting new infections as many school staff and teachers live outside the District?
S. What are the plans for OSSE's Transportation Department to ensure health and safety for our special education student population?
T. How will the Safe Passage program continue while ensuring social distancing?

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