

June 10, 2020

Dear colleagues in education,

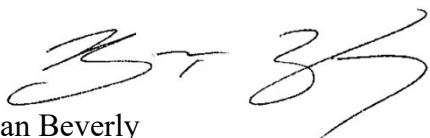
The past several months have presented unprecedented challenge and change to districts across Michigan and around the country. With short notice, districts have switched to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Michigan State University Office of K-12 Outreach continued to work with partner districts as they rose to the challenge to provide instruction in vastly different ways.

Now that the school year has drawn to a close, our focus has shifted to supporting districts as they plan for the coming school year. While the pandemic will continue to shape the educational landscape, school districts must begin planning as soon as possible to establish transparent communication efforts, implement concrete plans for viral mitigation, prepare for the potential of resumed remote instruction, and engage in an assessment of need after extended stay-at-home orders.

The Office of K-12 Outreach has created the attached document, *Re-Opening Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, to serve as an overview of the work that lies ahead. The Office of K-12 Outreach team has provided an overview of how to begin the planning process and the tasks that need to be tackled. We outline steps that districts can take to mitigate the risk of viral transmission when re-opening and ways that districts can reconceptualize the delivery of instruction and the use of assessment. While the task that lies ahead of the education community is substantial, we believe strongly in the ingenuity, knowledge, and commitment of district leaders, staff, and their communities to plan for robust, aligned, and science-based re-opening plans.

The K-12 Outreach staff are available to help craft and implement plans to re-open face-to-face instruction in your schools while mitigating the risk of viral transmission. The Office of K-12 Outreach is available to support you and your district as you develop a comprehensive plan that centers on the needs of the entire community, from students to educators and administrators to families. We are here to support you. The Office of K-12 Outreach has a long track record of supporting to schools. As a result, we can leverage our expertise to help create an individualized and locally responsive re-opening plan that meets established state and federal requirements and addresses the needs of your community. Our team of experienced school leaders are here to provide support and assistance as you move towards the 2020-2021 academic year. You can reach us by phone at (517) 353-8950 or by email at K12out@msu.edu

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bryan Beverly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bryan Beverly
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Re-Opening Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

An Overview of Guidance for School Districts

Michigan State University Office of K-12 Outreach

MAY 2020

Schooling During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Current Status

Nine out of ten students are out of school across the globe¹. In the United States, hundreds of thousands of American schools that serve over 97% of K-12 students are closed as a result of the COVID-19². Consequently, educators and school leaders are grappling with how to educate students remotely.

Planning for how to re-open schools and prepare for a long-term pandemic must begin now. This work is urgent given the expectation of severe and disparate effects from school closures and the knowledge that returning to business as usual will not be possible for the foreseeable future³.

Planning now for reopening schools is critical as the world confronts a new reality in the COVID-19 era. With no vaccine expected to be widely and safely available in the near term, America's educators and school leaders must re-envision schooling in this new reality.

While young children are still seen as at lower risk for serious illness, they have been identified as asymptomatic carriers and potential routes for bringing the virus home^{3,4}. In response, experts suggest that it will be necessary for schools to have extensive plans and protocols to mitigate the potential spread of the virus. The scope of the suggested strategies would dramatically reshape the school landscape.

While there is **no** way to resume face-to-face instruction during the pandemic that will not carry some risk of viral transmission, this report will outline multiple options for mitigation. Currently, the CDC recommends keeping small groups of students together throughout the school day as much as possible⁵. Reducing the number of students in a classroom is imperative given the new findings from the CDC that the virus is primarily transmitted by close contact (within 6 feet) with another person via respiratory droplets⁶. As of publication the CDC has not specified a maximum number for a classroom or means of calculating such a number. However, based on the average size of an American classroom and the need for six feet of social distancing, the cap in many classrooms would be approximately 12-15 students⁷. Employing this basic mitigation measure alone will dramatically impact instructional practice.

Re-Opening: Planning as Primary Mitigation Tool

The overarching concern when planning for re-opening schools is to ensure that there is adequate mitigation to prevent another resurgence of the virus in each district's home community. There are multiple ways that schools can consider resuming face-to-face instruction. This document outlines a variety of possible strategies. As of publication, there is neither state of Michigan or federal specifications on what schools will be required to do. While such documents may be forth coming, schools should begin planning now using these strategies which are based on national and international expertise. While there is **no** way to resume face-to-face instruction during the pandemic that will not carry some risk of viral

transmission, districts need to plan for and implement a combination of mitigation strategies to manage the risk of contributing to a recurrence of the virus in their communities⁸.

State Closure Still Open District Closure Closed Schools by School

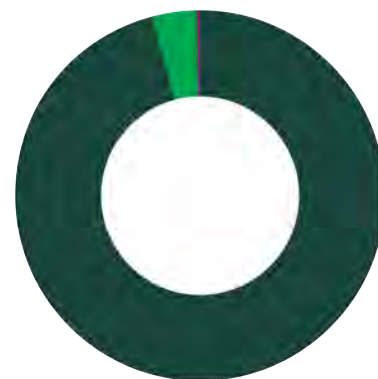
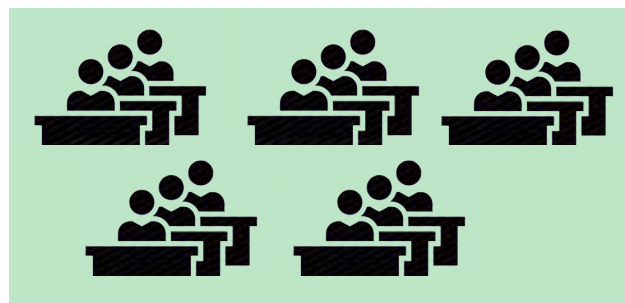


Image source: COVID-19 Impact: School Status Updates, current as of 5/19/2020 9:00:00 AM CST, by MCH Strategic Data. Compiled from public federal, state and local school information and media updates.



Re-Opening Planning Requires Intensive Equity Efforts

Impact of School Closures Will Have Differential Effects

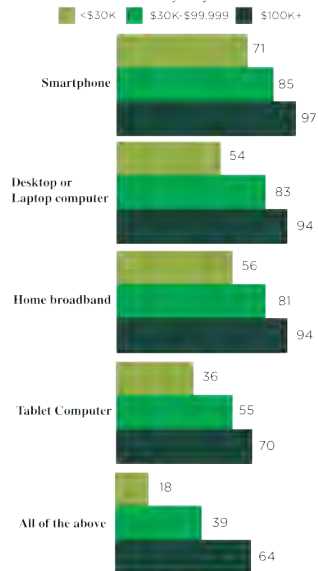
School closures have adverse impacts on all students^{1,9} due to increased anxiety and loss of peer and teacher interactions. Impacts are magnified for at-risk children^{3, 10, 11}. Inequities as a result of the pandemic stem from multiple dimensions—

- Parents on the front lines who must ask elder children to watch younger children parents who are working remotely and unable to full-time home-school their children
- Families experiencing dislocations in housing and food security
- Children living in homes with violence or addiction
- Families that lack on-line learning tools.

Access to on-line learning tools such as reliable computers and broadband internet is a major concern, as without broadband and home computing resources many children are being left out of direct instruction¹². As a result, children who already experience legacies of educational disadvantage due to structural racism, economic inequality, and environmental injustices will carry a heavier burden than their more advantaged peers. Plans to reopen schools must put issues of equity at the forefront¹¹.

Lower-income Americans have lower levels of technology adoption

% of U.S. adults who say they have the following...



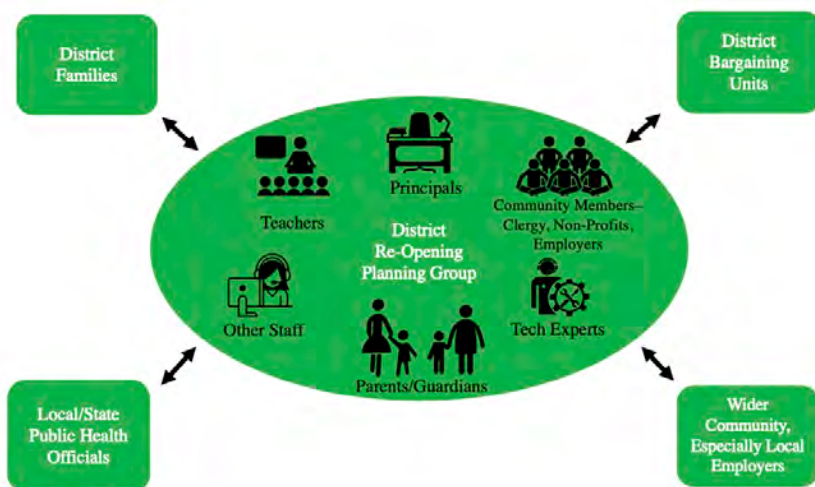
Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not known.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

School leaders and educators need to plan now to systematically and universally address the inequitable impact of COVID related school closures. Provisions should include providing for extensive social-emotional supports for students and staff, including counselling on-demand and leveraging trauma informed teaching strategies¹². Needs assessments should be conducted that identify student populations as well as individual students who will be most at risk upon return. Assessments should be reconceptualized to be formative rather than substantive to avoid any punitive effects for students most impacted by school closures^{11, 13}. (See the Special Concerns section for more on assessments.)

Schools are strongly urged to consider providing summer or after school programming that is prioritized to serve students identified through needs assessments¹². These students could be among the first welcomed back to school, if reopening is done in phases¹².

Planning for Re-Opening Must Start Now

While much remains in flux and the progression of the pandemic cannot be accurately mapped at this time, districts should begin planning nonetheless. The first, and perhaps most urgent needs, are for schools to engage in collaborative planning that involves parents, teachers, other school staff, unions, and public health officials^{3, 9, 12, 14}. (For more on issues around bargaining units, see the Special Concerns section.). School districts must develop new communication procedures to reach all traditional stakeholders and broaden communication to include state and county public health teams.



Source: 12

Consistent and reliable information exchange with public health officials will be necessary to stay abreast of changing rates of COVID infection in each district's location and the need for potential readjustments to plans being crafted. Further, being aware of shifting public health measures will allow districts lead time should they need to resume partial or total remote learning.

Involving parents and community members, especially employers, in formulating the reopening plan will provide for consensus building around difficult topics such as aligning hours for in-person schooling with the needs of working parents and their employers¹². Approximately 800,000 Michiganders depend on childcare to work, of these many rely on public schools to be able to work each day³.

Re-Opening Planning Requires New and Deeper Communication

An Iterative Process for Collaborative Re-Opening Planning



Source: 15

Communication is critical. Ensuring high levels of communication increases buy-in, commitment, and cooperation from school staff and families. Engaging all stakeholders, from the outset of planning, will increase the dissemination of information to all parties.

Once the work of the Re-Opening Planning Group has begun, the district should begin the process of soliciting community and stakeholder feedback to plans. Dates should be announced and publicized widely through multiple means.

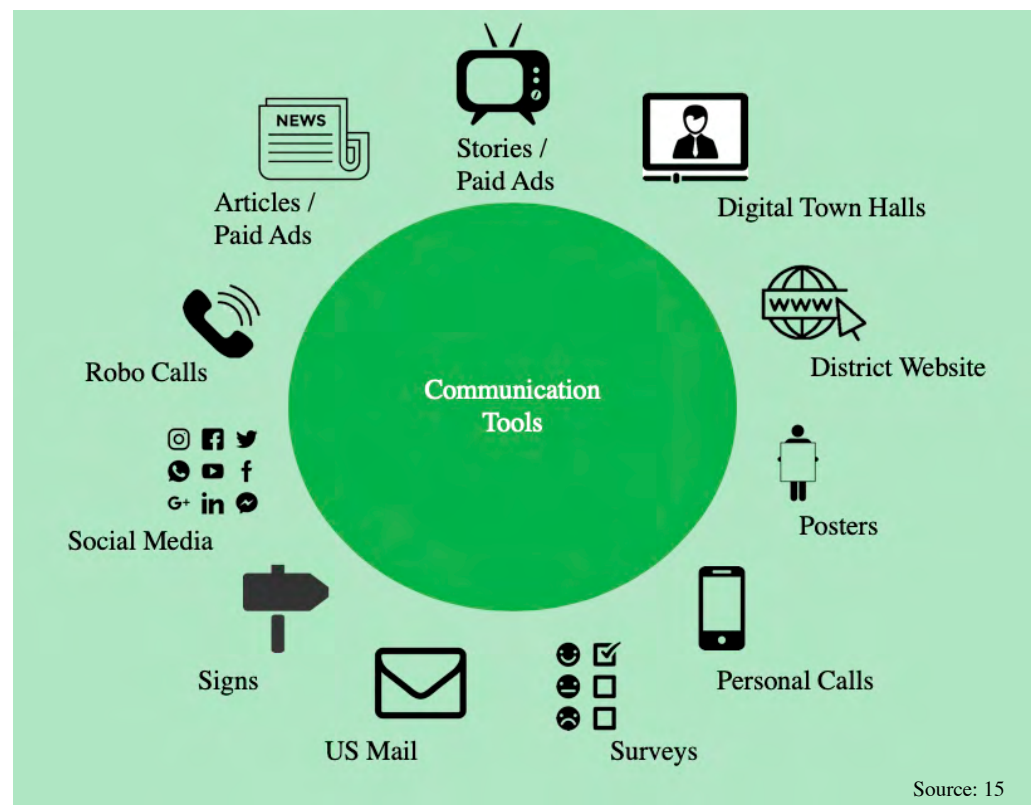
The district should establish a specific phone line and email to receive input and designate dedicated staff to gather and synthesize all responses and send them along to the Planning Group. Specific staff should be designated to respond to comments that are particularly challenging—including comments from community members who are not yet convinced of the need for mitigation strategies. The Planning Group should develop specific strategies to address this subset of the community.

Districts should consider contacting all stakeholders at regular intervals. This large-scale communication approach is crucial since relying on large public meetings will not likely be possible given the pandemic. Overcommunicate when in doubt.

Given the challenging nature of these times, districts should plan for virtual townhalls, webinars, televised presentations, and a variety of non-digital means of communication.

District employees should be tasked with creating a list of public gathering places such as the post offices, grocery stores, pharmacies, and parks where notices and posters can be displayed. By saturating places that many members of the public visit, districts can more efficiently reach stakeholders who are not families of district children.

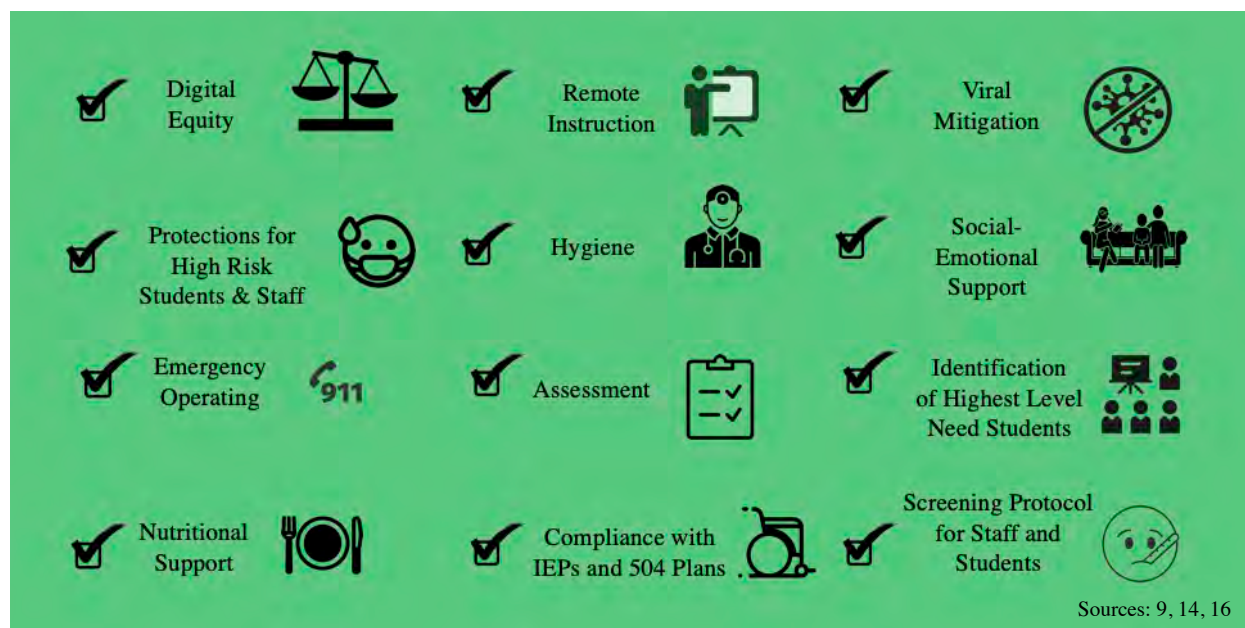
All district signage should advertise how the public can access the most recent drafts of plans and the email and phone numbers for submitting comments.



Source: 15

Plans Should Be in Place Before Re-Opening

Schooling requires the coordination of many streams of work. Mitigating the risk of viral transmission in such complex environments will require multiple layers of planning. The graphic art right outlines the breadth of planning that the CDC, Michigan's department of Licensing and Regulation, and UNICEF suggest be covered prior to re-opening schools.



Districts should have explicit plans for how to protect the health of medically vulnerable students and staff. Extensive plans for mitigation of transmission should be in place, including specific hygiene practices for all staff and students and increased sanitation processes.

Assessment practices should be analyzed and retooled to focus on formative assessment to guide instruction and designate students for additional remedial supports. Districts should be vigilant for signs of trauma among students and staff as the result of extended absence from school and impacts from COVID-19 such as bereavement and food or housing insecurity. Districts should have plans in place to meet expected counselling needs. An evaluation of which students were at higher levels of academic and/or social need pre-pandemic will allow immediate provision of additional screenings and supports to such students.

Instructional planning will need to take into account the limited class sizes which will require plans for both face-to-face instruction and supplemental remote learning. Some districts will have had little to no direct instruction since closure while others that had previously issued devices to students may have had far less severe interruptions to instruction. Experts estimate that the effects of school closure will be worse for lower income and at-risk students³. Instructional planning needs to stretch to cover the contingency that the pandemic may cause further school closings^{9, 12}. Planning now for either partial or total remote learning is crucial to provide high-quality instruction that maintains equity.

Districts need to craft plans for how to deliver services to students who have IEPs and/or 504 plans. Staff should evaluate where additional services are needed upon re-opening. In addition, extensive and explicit plans need to be made on how specialized services will be delivered if schools have to close again.

District food service plans need to include ways to serve food while mitigating risk and how to provide nutritional support to students should schools need to close again. Additionally, given the chance of viral resurgence, districts should update emergency operations plans and have robust instructional plans for returning to total remote instruction.

Successfully reopening schools will take a concerted effort. The following pages detail an array of mitigation strategies that districts can consider.

Strategies to Mitigate the Risk of COVID-19 Transmission

The task of covering all the bases mentioned in the previous pages is substantial. There are a wide variety of individual mitigation strategies that can be employed to create provisions to guide district staff and students. District mitigation plans should consider implementing selections from across the four domains of Student Cohort Mitigation Strategies, School Year Schedule Mitigation Strategies, Building Mitigation Strategies, and Classroom Mitigation Strategies.

Re-Opening: Student Cohort Mitigation

Managing Student Capacity Limits

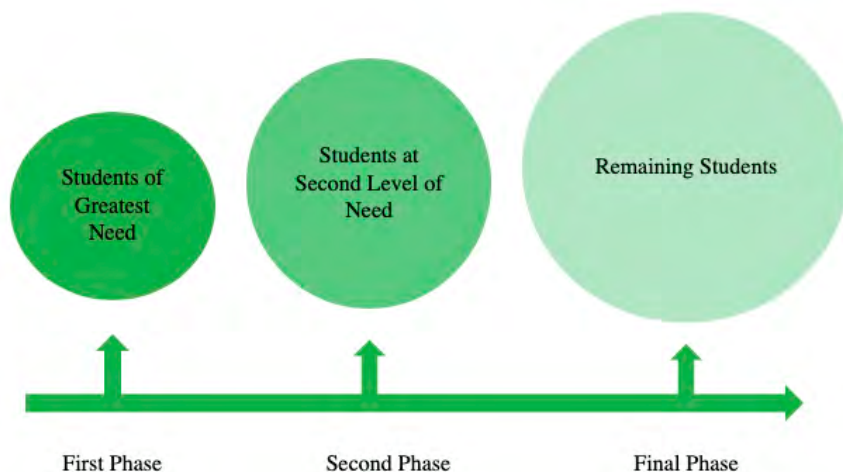
The single largest means of mitigation that a school can achieve is to limit exposures among students. Districts will need to calculate the number of students that a classroom can carry while maintaining the recommended six feet of social distancing. Reducing class sizes to only 12-15 students at a time reduces viral transmission between students and thus the overall exposures of school families and in turn the overall exposures of the entire community.

However, this poses a challenge to almost every school, public or private, in the United States. Precious few schools can boast that their maximum class size is 15. In an ideal world, all schools would be immediately able to hire additional teachers to meet this number. However the budgetary reality of schools prohibits such a bold move. This may be increasingly the case as states confront staggering fiscal losses due to the pandemic.

As a result, experts suggest exploring how cohorting students could allow schools to meet the suggested 12-15 student capacity cap. While all of the strategies below allow for the limitation of the number of students in the classroom at one time, it does not solve the fact that districts must figure out how to arrange teacher and staff workloads to allow for both face-to-face instruction and subsequent remote instruction OR either wave additional instructional time for students not in a face-to-face setting or obtain agreement from teachers and staff to increase their workloads to take on remote instruction on top of face-to-face instruction. None of these are small tasks or minor concerns.

Equity Based Cohorts

Districts could implement an equity-centered model of reopening by identifying students with the greatest levels of need. District officials could re-open by first welcoming students with IEPs or 504 Plans, students who receive Title 31-A funding, Districts should expand their analysis to include students who were known to be previously food or housing insecure, and/or subject to neglect or abuse.



Sources: 3, 12

Students of lower categories of need would continue with remote instruction until such time as class sizes could be increased to larger numbers. This strategy would ensure that students who are most at-risk during remote schooling receive instruction and are thus protected from declines in their learning.

Similarly, districts could consider welcoming back students are critical time periods of learning, such as early elementary grades when students are building their literacy and mathematical reasoning skills. Students who attend vocational and/or pre-professional programs that offer certificates could be welcomed before standard high school classmates.

While soundly based in educational needs, equity based cohorts bear the possibility of backlash. Parents of children not triaged to the group designated for initial return may raise complaints about the fairness of such plans. Districts that seek to restart schooling using equity based cohorts should plan for additional public education and specialized communications to raise awareness of the need for the approach.

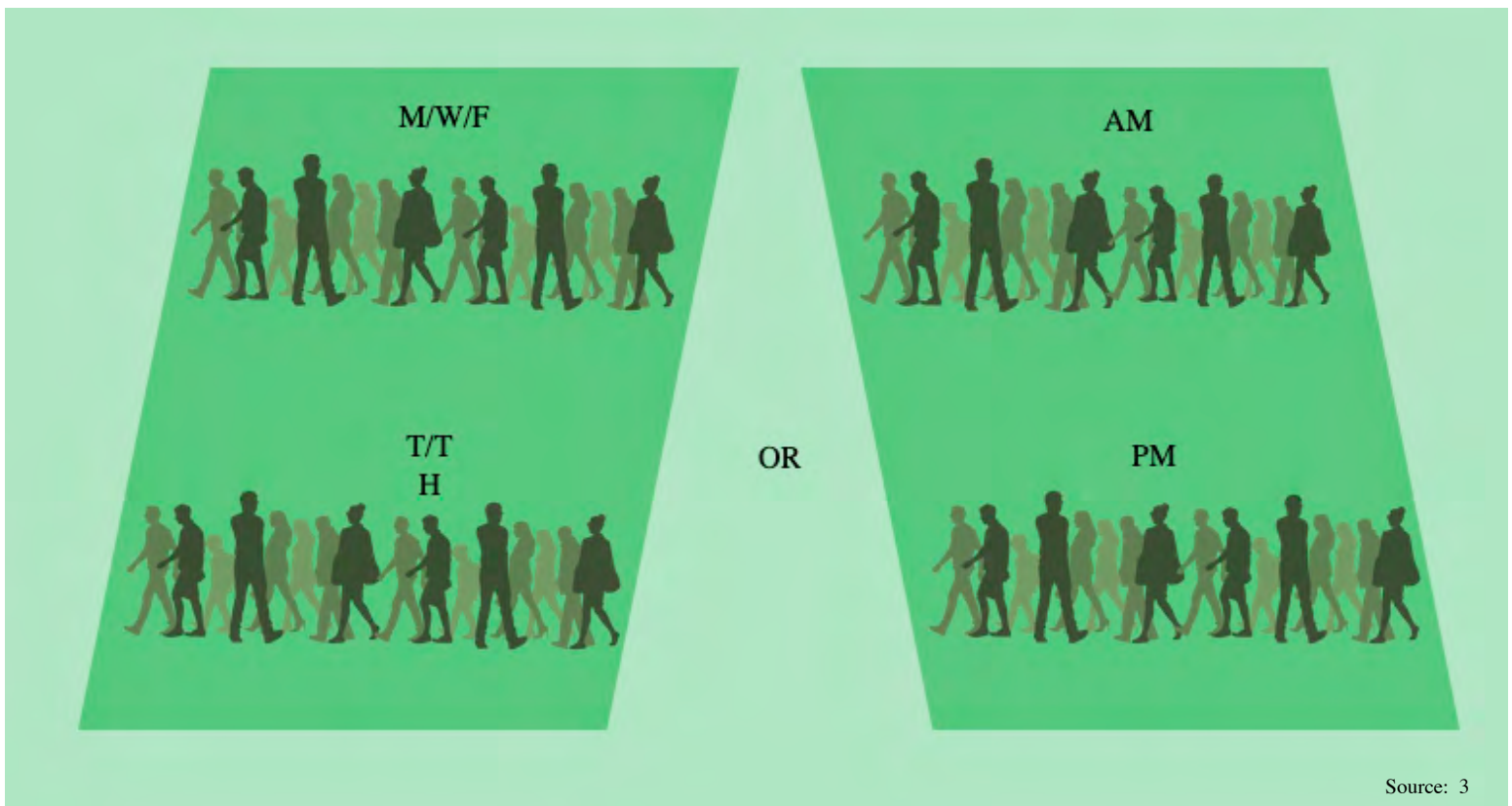
Time Based Cohorts

Districts can choose to meet the suggested limits of than 12-15 students per classroom by cohorting students' attendance by time of day or days of the week.

For example, students assigned to a morning cohort would attend in person in the morning and then continue their schooling at home remotely. Similarly, students in a M/W/F cohort would attend in person on those days of the week and continue their schooling remotely the other days of the week.

The alternate day of week cohort strategy lends itself to concerns of equity. Students identified as higher need could attend as part of the M/W/F cohort. Groups also alternate between M/W/F and T/Th attendance.

The West Bloomfield School District announced on May 18th that classes would be divided into two cohorts¹⁷. One cohort would attend on Mondays and Tuesdays. All buildings would be closed on Wednesdays for cleaning and sanitizing. Students would engage in remote learning. The second cohort would in person on Thursdays and Fridays. Each cohort would engage in remote learning while not in the classroom.



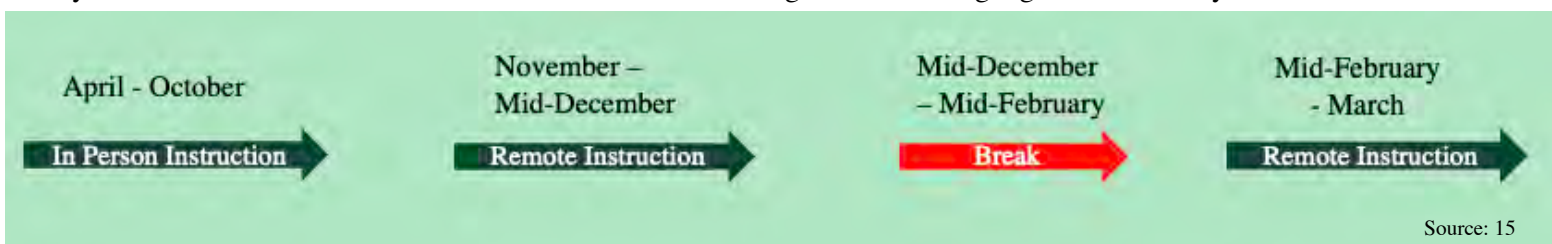
Re-Opening: School Year Schedule Mitigation

Changed Schedules to Interrupt Viral Transmission

For the first time in the history of this country, a massive number of students were simultaneously away from their schools during standard instructional time. This unprecedented shift in schedule was forced by the need to interrupt the fast-moving pandemic. Debate over the current American school system of 9 months on and 3 months off has had little effect on the calendars of most schools. At this challenging moment, districts may want to consider shifting schedules that suppress and/or interrupt viral transmission⁸. Many of the following models can be combined.

Reversed + Remote Instruction Schedule

The American model of education, based on a lengthy summer break, is a defining feature of schooling. By reversing the traditional calendar and using the spring and summer months for outdoor instruction, districts could avoid high risk times of the year. Districts could then build in remote instruction and longer breaks during high-risk times of year.



In such a model, the number of days of school are just rearranged to avoid the winter months. Districts would need to have extensive plans for remote instruction that would detail how all students would be guaranteed access to instruction during remote instruction periods.

Balanced Calendar + Remote Instruction Schedule

A small number of American schools already have adopted the balanced calendar. Adding remote instruction to the balanced calendar allows for a return to semi-isolation. Such interruptions to transmission can reduce the overall spread of the virus while allowing for any nascent cases to emerge and be quarantined. Intermittent school breaks every 9 weeks serve to further interrupt viral transmission.



To successfully enact this schedule, districts would need to have extensive plans for remote instruction that would detail how all students would be guaranteed access to instruction during remote instruction periods.

Four/Ten Instruction Schedule

Experts at the Weisman Institute suggest that face-to-face work happen for four consecutive days followed by ten days of remote work. This model could be extended to schools if all students attend for four consecutive days and then spend the next two school weeks engaged in remote learning. This 4/10 time frame exploits the virus' replication timeframe and allows for student or teacher who may have been exposed to be remotely learning when they become infectious.

This strategy alone would potentially allow for standard sized classrooms but would put a heavy reliance on the ability of the district to provide equitable remote instruction to at-risk students.



To successfully enact this schedule, districts would need to have extensive plans for remote instruction that would detail how all students would be guaranteed access to instruction during remote instruction periods.

Re-Opening: Mitigation Through Building Level Changes

To successfully mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission, schools will need to significantly increase their sanitation procedures, institute student and staff hygiene routines, and change some aspects of how they structure their physical plants. The CDC recommends that districts employ **all** of the following mitigation strategies, regardless of the current level of community transmission in their area.

Experts recommend that all school facilities be thoroughly sanitized between each group of students or everyday, whichever is more frequent. For high risk areas, such as bathrooms, sanitization is recommended hourly. Districts are encouraged to leave windows open to boost the circulation of fresh air whenever possible.

Students and staff will need to be trained, and comply with, frequent and effective handwashing. Handwashing stations should be provided at each entrance to the building. Students and staff should sanitize or wash their hands upon entering/exiting the building, as well as at least every hour, after using the restroom, sneezing/coughing, or eating.



Personal protective equipment should be available for staff and students who need them. Recent findings have shown that inhalation of respiratory droplets is the most likely avenue for infection. Staff and students (who are older than two years of age) should be encouraged to wear cloth face masks whenever possible to help stop respiratory droplets from traveling in the air and on to others. While some students

may not be able to manage wearing masks (younger students who are not yet able to understand the need for masks or children with medical challenges), even having some school members wearing cloth masks can be helpful at mitigating risk of viral transmission.

Schools will need to provide physically separate spaces for students or staff who show symptoms of illness. A separate space will need to be designated to provide standard medical care (issuing medicines) and care for injuries. In addition, each doorway needs to be provided with a hand washing/sanitizing station. As much as possible, windows should be left open to allow for the circulation of fresh air which promotes viral mitigation.

Districts should consider closing off high-traffic areas that previously served many people simultaneously, such as cafeterias, libraries, gyms, and teachers' lounges. Instead, specialists could visit each classroom to provide art, music, and adapted physical education. Teachers could eat in the classroom with their students. Programs that involved children or staff moving between buildings should be limited or eliminated. This will prohibit the potential spread of infection between buildings.

Finally, schools will need to design and implement tracking systems for student and staff absences and symptoms. Personal protective equipment (PPE) will need to be available to all students and staff who are in need of it. Schools should limit entrance to the school while students are in attendance to only essential staff.

Re-Opening: Mitigation Through Classroom Level Changes

Mitigating the transmission of COVID-19 will require changes to how most American classrooms function. The CDC recommends that districts employ **all** of the following mitigation strategies, regardless of the current level of community transmission in their area.

Standard procedures for lining-up, arrival/dismissal, lunch, and others will need to be changed and explicitly taught to staff and students.

To reduce points of contact among children, the use of common gathering areas such as the gym, cafeteria, and playgrounds will need to be reconfigured.

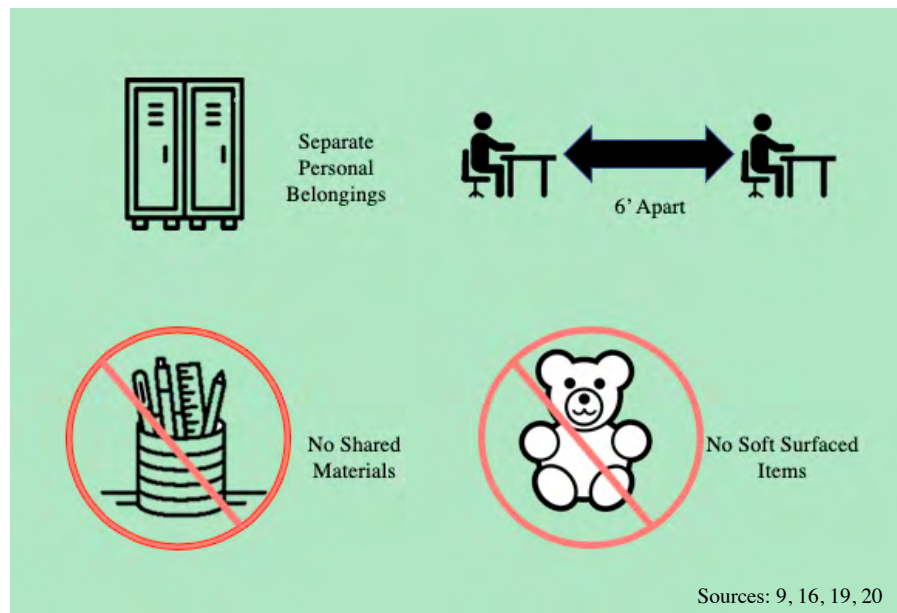
Experts advise having students eat lunch in their classroom and that the teacher's lounge be closed. All lunches should be served in covered, single-serving containers. That means that serving lines would have to be eliminated in favor of delivery of boxed lunches to classrooms.

Children should be given access to the playground either in shifts by classroom or to restricted portions of the playground. Boundaries for designated areas would need to be well demarcated and enforced.

Similarly, trips to the bathroom should be done in shifts by classrooms with supervision to maintain appropriate spacing.

To achieve appropriate spacing, schools should create markings on the floors to support students and staff maintaining at

least six feet of distance. Procedures for lining up will need to be changed to use additional doors and/or to stagger entry/dismissal. The interiors of each classroom should allow for six feet of space between student desks and separated storage for all personal materials. Classroom materials should not be shared, or if shared will need to be disinfected between student uses.



Further, any soft surfaces, such as plush toys and pillows, should be removed from classrooms as they cannot be adequately sanitized. Wooden toys are less optimal, but can be used if sanitized regularly.

Re-Opening: The Costs of Mitigation

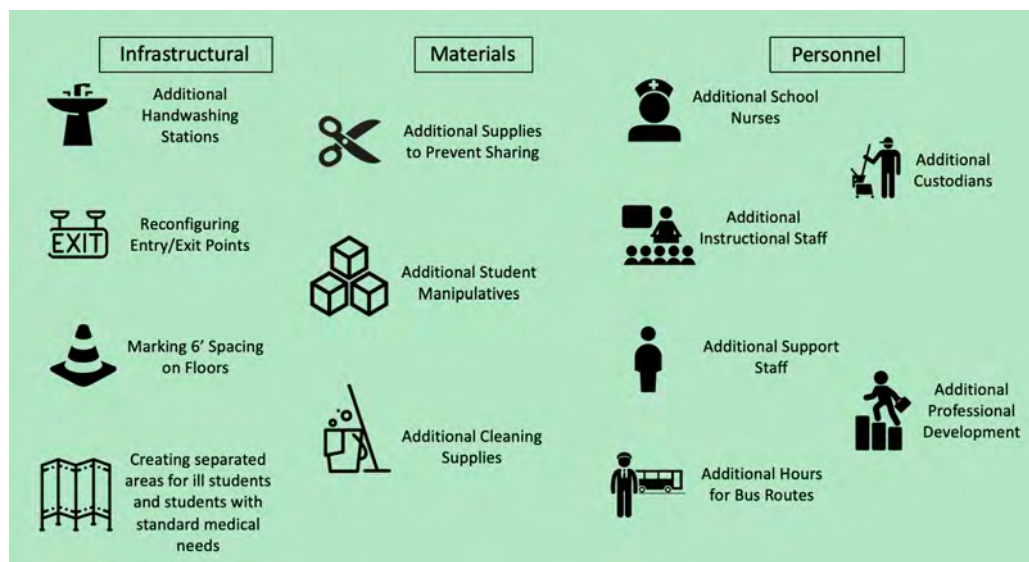
Areas of Potential Increased District Expenditures

The costs of the COVID-19 pandemic to the United States is already estimated at almost \$1 trillion, over 11 million lost jobs, and as of May 19, almost 90,000 deaths⁵. These initial figures are staggering. The mitigation strategies listed in this document are an attempt to preserve both life and economic activity. If schools can operate with successful mitigation and play their role in preventing a resurgence of the virus with its attendant shutdowns, everyone can benefit.

In this unprecedented time, American schools are being asked to engage in new and extraordinary measures to ensure that schooling can continue. Elected officials and state and federal policy makers need to see both the pivotal role that schools will play in regaining normalcy AND the unavoidable fact that to do so will entail significant additional expenditures on the parts of schools. Now is not the time to cut education funding. Instead, legislators at all levels need to work together to establish budgeting and funding similar to what Roosevelt pioneered with the New Deal. Funding should be prioritized to address the gaps in spending that have arisen as a result of differential levels of special needs students in urban districts, rebalance funding mechanisms to reduce budgetary impacts of declining enrollment²². Elected officials should consider a wide range of revenue streams. In Michigan, a common sense argument can and should be made to return our state finances to 2007 levels by reinstating taxes that have been slashed. The state of Michigan, and others states, should consider boosting revenue from tax streams that are both fair and efficient, such as taxing sales tax to services and alcohol sales, increasing the gas tax, and/or instituting a graduated income tax. Tax codes need to be revised to eliminate loopholes and credits. Districts should be given greater license to raise millages to enhance their operations. Finally, it is time for a deep accounting of the ways in which charter schools and school choice policies exacerbate and perpetuate inequities in educational opportunities for children²².

Our state and country need an expanded investment in public education to allow for a successful reopening of schools. A substantial number of parents in Michigan depend on public school to education their children while they are at work. If schools are not open, many Americans cannot in good conscience go to work leaving their children alone. If schools open without successful mitigation strategies and the means to implement them, America faces a resurgence of the virus in the fall which could lead to another complete shut down²³.

The choice is in the hands of elected officials, both at the state and federal level. To get back to normal, America needs significant, innovative, and bold investments in her schools. Costs that districts should expect include infrastructural changes, purchasing of extra materials, and significant additional payments to personnel.



Personnel expenditures will increase to handle the need for additional school nurses to assist in the monitoring of symptoms and absences, additional custodial staff to complete required sanitation routines, funding to carryout extensive professional development on how to engage in remote education using the best teaching techniques, paying for additional hours to bus drivers who drive reduced capacity routes, and additional instructional staff to support remote instruction in the face of caps on the number of students in the classrooms.

Additional Concerns

Working with Bargaining Units

Strong collaborative communication with the district's union(s) will be crucial as some mitigation measures are likely to involve duties governed by labor agreements. Districts that have one or more negotiated bargaining agreements will want ensure that communication is flowing freely between the District Re-Opening Working Group and stewards of all the bargaining units.

Discussions/negotiations should include:

- How to protect staff who observe violations of district guidelines on mitigation
- Potential changes to teaching schedules and arrangements (including reversion to remote instruction if needed)
- Changes to sick leave so that ill employees of all rank are not forced to chose to come to work sick or face financial hardship
- Specific provisions that will be made for continued employment of at-risk teachers
- The possibility of changes to contract-specified release times such as lunch and recess.



Reframing Assessments as Tools for Student Support



Experts are recommending that schools and education leaders reconceive the role of assessments as schools reopen^{9, 13}. Given the massive dislocation in school and the stress and trauma of the long period of isolation, assessment should focus on formative evaluations of students for the course of the 2020-21 school year. This is all the more true given the equity concerns surrounding differential access to education and differential engagement during school closure.

A tight focus on formative assessments will help schools respond to gaps that have emerged or worsened during school closures¹². Such assessment will enable schools to support families and students in meeting learning goals. Schools and

teachers will be able to focus on the need for remediation without fear of penalty that would arise if summative assessment scores did not meet accountability requirements. To achieve this reframing of assessments to serve the teaching and learning needs of teachers and their students, state legislators and departments of education will need to evaluate and amend rules and laws that govern student assessments and accountability measures.

Assessment practices also should expand to survey the social-emotional and well-being of students. Children who return to school suffering from stress and trauma because of the pandemic will need additional support to thrive and succeed academically^{9, 12, 19, 24, 25, 26}. Research shows that student social-emotional well being influences student academic achievement. Thus, schools should assess all returning students and plan to provide the necessary counselling and supports to enable students to be successful.

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Re-Opening: Education in the Era of COVID-19

Challenges and Opportunities

Clearly, the scope of what will be required to safely and equitably reopen schools is significant and multi-faceted. Given the complexity of the situation, it is imperative that federal leaders engage developing clear, concise, and comprehensive guidance now to spare states and districts duplication of effort^{21, 27}. Strong guidance at either the state or national level is crucial to allow schools to coordinate with their local communities and to provide legitimacy to plans that involve compromises from all stakeholders²⁸.

School districts and their local communities-- especially families and employers-- have much at stake at this time. Given the severe impact the pandemic has had on state budgets, stakeholders need to raise the awareness of elected officials about the crucial role that public schools play in keeping our communities working and healthy. Now is not the time for cuts to American public education, but a moment for reinvestment and reinvigoration of an institution that provides a vital service to communities²⁹. Public policy and educational regulation and law need to be revisited and revised in the face of the challenges the pandemic presents. The need for more flexible scheduling to meet mitigation needs and the incorporation of remote learning call for a critical look at how instructional time requirements are formulated and enforced. Similarly, state and federal policy makers and legislators will need to revisit the use of standardized testing and how accountability measures are structured and enforced given that the College Board's effort to hold Advanced Placement tests on line this spring were riddled with difficulties and have led to lawsuits³⁰.

As districts and stakeholders partner to envision a new normal for schooling there are challenges. But in these times, challenges also can serve as the opportunity to change old structures and adapt practices to better serve children. Americans can and will come through this crisis. Working together will provide each one of us the best chance at a healthy and productive future. The Office of K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University stands in solidarity with school districts in their work to provide high quality education to students while mitigating the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The Michigan State University Office of K-12 Outreach

Collective Capacity Building and Leadership Development

The Office of K-12 Outreach, under the leadership of Director Dr. Bryan Beverly, has unmatched experience in developing and implementing customized support for schools and districts in Michigan seeking to turnaround their schools and rapidly improve student achievement. Our unique field-oriented service organization within the university brings a 20-year history of collaboration with schools and districts across the state. K-12 Outreach has experience working with school districts on topics ranging from staff professional development to central office transformations to equity, and it is available in this new environment to help districts plan for school re-opening.

K-12 Outreach is available to help districts plan for school re-opening.

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