Guidance for Families – Planning for the 2020-21 School Year

Introduction

As Minnesota school districts and charter schools plan for the 2020-21 school year, so are Minnesota families. This document will give families a quick overview of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidance for schools and so families know what information they should expect from their child's school.

School districts must be prepared for any situation that may arise during the COVID-19 pandemic. MDE is has directed schools to prepare for three scenarios:

- Scenario 1: In person learning for all students
- Scenario 2: Hybrid learning with strict social distancing and capacity limits
- Scenario 3: Distance learning only

Due to the unpredictable nature of the virus, school districts and charter schools may need to use more than one scenario during the school year. Additionally, the transition to a new scenario may need to happen quickly. **In each of these plans, schools must address** how they operate the school building, how they will support students and families, and how they will support their educators in their professional development. Schools are expected to partner with their school community as they develop these plans. Final plans must be translated and communicated in written and oral languages based on the needs of each community.

New measures to protect the health and safety of students, families and staff must be taken in Scenarios 1 and 2. Considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Nonessential visitors, volunteers and activities involving external groups should be restricted.
- Staff monitor arrival and dismissal to ensure students move from their vehicle directly to and from their classroom, as well as minimize congregating.
- Staff and students should wear cloth face coverings and/or nonmedical face shields throughout the school day. Cloth coverings should not be placed on:

  - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious.
  - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
  - Anyone who cannot tolerate a cloth face covering due to developmental, medical, or behavioral health needs.

- Build hand hygiene into the daily schedule for all students and staff, including handwashing and sanitation breaks during or between activities.
- Establish a schedule for routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces and shared equipment throughout the day.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk.

If you are uncomfortable sending your child back to school, each district and charter school will provide an option for distance learning.

	Scenario 1: In-person learning for all students	Scenario 2: Hybrid learning with strict social distancing and capacity limits	Scenario 3: Distance learning only
Overview	In this planning scenario, schools should create as much space between students and teachers as possible during the day. However, schools will not need to strictly enforce 6 feet of social distancing during primary instructional time in the classroom.	In this planning scenario, schools must limit the overall number of people in school facilities and on transportation vehicles to 50% maximum occupancy. Sufficient social distancing with at least 6 feet between people must occur at all times. If distancing cannot be achieved in a space or on a transportation vehicle, the number of occupants must be reduced. Schools must also include plans for contactless pick-up and/or delivery of meals and school materials for days that students and staff are not in the school building, as well as implementation of a school-age care program for critical workers.	This planning scenario may be implemented if local, regional, or statewide COVID-19 metrics worsen significantly enough to require the suspension of in-person learning. Schools may be open to provide emergency child care, meals and/or other functions.

Academics	In order to help support student's academic success, schools will develop a plan in which they will:
	
	• Identify a process to determine student learning gaps and target individual student learning needs.
	• Explore and determine which extended learning strategies are effective for each school
	• Provide or expand intervention time within school day to help fill learning gaps for individual students
	• Set expectations for virtual programs/structures to continue to be used or embedded into classroom lessons, which will make a future transition easier if needed.
		In order to help support student's academic success, schools will develop a plan in which they will:
		
		• Incorporate all considerations in Scenarios 1 and 3.
		• Prioritize student groups that could be brought back to buildings, with these considerations:
		
		   o Younger student learning loss may be highest.
		   o High school juniors and seniors may need more immediate support for college prep and transition.
		   o All students could benefit from time in buildings with teachers.
			In order to help support student's academic success, schools will develop a plan in which they will:
			
			• Develop student feedback and/or grading plans for distance learning and make any needed policy adjustments.
			• Develop individualized plans for all students representing special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners, gifted and exceptional students, etc.).
			• Plan inclusion and pull-out structures for special education students in need of additional support.
			• Consider additional support for students with IEPs.
			• Determine support structures needed to supplement instruction for English

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		• Prioritize what can/should be taught in physical classrooms compared to distance learning. • Determine best schedules for students with an IEP.	learners (e.g., interpreters, software options, etc.). • Plan for progress monitoring in a virtual setting for students, especially younger students.
Student & Family Support	In order to support students and families, schools should develop a plan in which they will: • Communicate regularly with students and families regarding implications to the way school operates. • Activate school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and school nurses to develop individual and group mental health support plans for students and families. • Elevate student voice and participation in leadership decisions as students return to school buildings. • Consider surveying older students to allow them to share where they think they have academic or social needs. • Follow MDH and Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) guidance about in-school and out-of-school activities and sports. • Consider implementing social-emotional learning and/or whole-child programming that connects academics to student well-being. • Create a plan to build relationships with new students, including young students in early learning programs.	In order to support students and families in a hybrid model, schools should develop a plan in which they will: • Incorporate all considerations in Scenarios 1 and 3. • Create consistent opportunities for students to build school culture when they have the chance to be in the building. • Ensure students who are distance learning all or most days have the chance to contribute.	In order to support students and families, schools should develop a plan in which they will: • Create office hour and hotline options for students to get help or talk to a teacher or adult. • Develop and require as many opportunities as possible for student-to-student interaction. • Communicate regularly with families and identify additional supports needed. • Provide ways for administrators to be consistently "visible" to students and families in a virtual setting (e.g., weekly "Principal Talk" session or "mail box" video or weekly newsletter to respond to questions or concerns). • Consider incorporating social emotional learning programs and find ways to integrate student voice. • Consider a back-to-school virtual open house or meet-and-greet. • Consider other school spirit "events" such as spirit days and friendly competitions that can happen remotely.

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Breakfast and Lunch	In order to safely serve breakfast and lunch, schools should develop a plan for meal times in which they will: • Keep students and staff in small cohort groups that stay together as much as possible (including meal times). • Mark 6 feet of spacing to remind students and staff to say 6 feet apart in lines and when congregating. • Discontinue self-service food or beverage distribution in the cafeteria. • Individually wrap food and drinks whenever possible.	In order to safely serve breakfast and lunch, schools should develop a plan for meal times in which they will: • Use all considerations in Scenario 1. • Create a process for students who are not physically at school on certain days to still receive meals by home delivery, curb-side pick-up, bus stop pick-up or other methods.	In order to safely serve breakfast and lunch, schools should develop a plan for meal times in which they will create a process for all students to still receive meals either by home delivery, curb-side pick-up, bus stop pick-up or other methods.
Transportation	In order to safely transport students to and from school, schools should develop a plan in which they will: • Systematically review and evaluate school transportation capacity with the goal of creating as much space between riders as possible, recognizing that it is not always feasible to have 6 feet of social distancing. • Consider reducing capacity or adding routes or allow for more physical space between riders. Keep families in the same seat, if possible. • Load bus from back to front.	In order to safely transport students to and from school, schools should develop a plan in which they will: • Limit the number of people on transportation vehicles to 50% maximum occupancy. Ensure sufficient social distancing with at least 6 feet between people at all times (e.g. one student per seat (households may sit together)), one seat between students). • If distancing cannot be achieved, the number of occupants must be reduced.	
Attendance	Attendance will be taken the same way it is done during a typical school year.	Schools will determine the best way to take attendance, while considering: • Hybrid instruction could be provided in one or a combination of schedules depending on the school, classes and/or grade levels.	Schools will determine the best way to take attendance, while considering: • Distance learning instruction can be provided in a way that allows students to receive daily, interactive instruction remotely.

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		• Each student and teacher has a daily schedule that supports the length of the school day reported. • Students participating less than the full scheduled day are reported as part time.	• Students must have documented student-teacher or parent-teacher contact on a given day to be reported as in attendance on that day, i.e., schools must take positive rather than passive attendance.

Equity

Minnesota defines educational equity as the condition of justness, fairness and inclusion in our systems of education so that all students have access to the opportunities to learn and develop to their fullest potential. The pursuit of educational equity recognizes the historical conditions and barriers that have prevented opportunity and success in learning for students based on their races, incomes, and social conditions. Eliminating those structural and institutional opportunities requires systemic change that allows for distribution of resources, information and other support depending on the student's situation to ensure an equitable outcome.

Equitably Serving All Students

Equity is a priority to reach all children, especially children of color, Indigenous children, immigrant children, low-income families and communities, and students receiving special education services. Access to mental health services and support, hands-on student education and support, broadband and devices, and consistent instructional expectations continue to be concerns for many students. Responding to these challenges will take innovation and collaboration. Some important considerations in meeting the needs of all students include:

- Each of the three scenarios must include plans for **special education** programs, special education services, special education staff and students with IEP's in all instructional settings, including Level 4 programs. Special education provides individualized services to students with unique needs for learning supports, in specialized environments for learning. In this regard, special education programs and students with individual needs for learning supports are important considerations in planning to serve students whether via in-person learning, hybrid learning or distance learning. At the school district, program and individual student level, planning should focus on maximizing effectiveness of specialized instruction and related services, while minimizing COVID-19 infection risk through adherence to safety measures.
- Districts and charter schools need to take into consideration the needs of **American Indian students and their families** in every part of the planning process. Regardless of which learning scenario is determined for the fall, schools must include voices from the communities who will be the most impacted. All school districts and charter schools that are required under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to consult with Tribal Nations must also collaborate with TNEC members regarding the formulation of their fall learning plans.
- Regardless of scenario, districts and charter schools should prioritize relationship building and engagement with **English learner students, students experiencing homelessness and migrant students**. Student contact time (whether in-person or remote) should be used for conferring, providing feedback, setting individual learning goals, and/or checking on progress. Incorporate the experiences of students to enrich the curriculum. Writing assignments, projects, community experts and student choice help make learning relevant and engaging.