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OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
STATE OF MONTANA

Putting Montana Students First

School Re-entry & Recovery After a Pandemic Event

**Disclaimer: Any information appearing in this document regarding COVID-19 is subject to change. The information contained in this document is current as of 4/29/2020. This document is for general informational purposes only and should not be construed as advice, requirements or mandates. The information, samples, templates, tips, and techniques provided in this document are intended solely as examples of practices, do not impose, or imply legal or regulatory requirements, and may not apply to all situations based upon circumstances. This document does not substitute for any law, or regulations, CDC or other public health messages or guidance.*

Per the Governor Directives (Appendix A) and in coordination with local public health departments who are authorized to announce the process for recovery, the school district working with authority of the local school board may begin the preparations for the reopening of schools. The information provided can be followed for after-school programs and summer learning programs. Please note, any directive by the Governor will appear in green font.

As we approach the opening of our buildings and welcoming students back, we encourage schools to continue to take safety precautions to ensure the health of their students, staff, and greater community.

As demonstrated in the Governor's orders, re-entry of students can also be conducted in three distinct phases, following current CDC guidelines and other safety measures to prevent a re-emergence of COVID-19.

It is recommended that you reestablish your schools/districts "Emergency Operation Team" (EOP) and assign a lead for the following recovery areas:

a) Academic Programming

b) Physical & Structural Environment

c) Business Environment

d) Social, Emotional and Behavioral

As the school reopens the EOP team can monitor the progression through the three distinct phases.

Why is this monitoring critical? Because the virus does not move, people move. The biggest challenge in getting back to normal is the people movement. Threats may come from neighboring counties, and when travel restrictions have been lifted, neighboring states and countries. Remember this phrase, "Zero new growth in cases does not mean zero risk." We encourage schools to remain vigilant in maintaining their highest emergency response measures.

The three progressive phases are the following:

a) Phase 1: Limiting the number of students present in school building.

b) Phase 2: Full capacity but limiting number of activities to allow for continued social distancing.

c) Phase 3: Full capacity and full operations.

In all phases all staff are encouraged to monitor for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms and with school administration in contact with the local health department for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators.

Phase 1: Limiting the number of students present in school building.

Establish an estimated school re-opening timeline and share with staff, parents, and the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Gatherings of groups larger than normal class size are recommended being cancelled (e.g. assemblies, recess).

Academic Programming

- Instruction department identifies steps to restore instructional integrity.
- Consider refraining from school events that draw crowds. (ex. end of school year events for students and moving up/graduation ceremonies for families)

  GRADUATION CEREMONIES
  - Provide a live stream of graduation
  - Consider limiting spectator attendance
  - For larger schools, consider grouping graduates or providing multiple ceremonies
  - Follow social distancing between families
- Develop an "instructional reconstruction" checklist (base on the length of school closure; if short-term, the checklist should be focused on make-up work and reorganizing the instructional calendar, benchmarks, testing, etc.; if the closure was long-term, the checklist may require restructuring of the current and following school year instructional and operational calendar and events) to guide staff, students, and parents when school reopens. The checklist may include anticipated instructional materials and supplies, as well as possible waivers from the Montana Office of Public Instruction.
- Health and Physical education teachers are encouraged to provide Disease Prevention Curriculum to all students.
- Cancel extracurricular activities.
- **ACCOMMODATIONS** for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group:

  - Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into the at-risk category because of their age or other health risks. These individuals should have additional accommodations including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.

  - Students who are high risk or who have family members who are high risk should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.

  - Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.

- Organize pre-developed study packets and suggested activities for students and parents in case of second closure of schools due to re-emergence of the virus and/or for students who remain in the distance learning environments due to individual/family high-risk categories.
    - o Web-based education considerations:
    - ・Cable Access educational television (with closed caption)
    - ・Cable Educational shows (with closed caption)
    - ・Video-streaming (with closed caption)
    - ・Textbook and study guide depositories with drive-through capabilities
    - ・Teleconferencing

Physical & Structural Environment

- Prepare classrooms by wiping down surfaces with disinfecting cleaners. Please note, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, PPE are in very short supply and should be ordered ASAP. Supplies ordered now may not arrive for several weeks/months.
- Prepare an isolation area within the school building, supply an isolation area with personal protective equipment.
- Provide hand sanitizer.
- Keep libraries, gyms, playgrounds off-limits, unless they can be sanitized between groups.
- Utilize student distance spacing strategies to decrease contact with students, who may be infected, but not exhibiting symptoms, until school returns to normal operations.
- Maintain a status update for facilities not ready for occupancy.
- Inspect all buildings, facilities, equipment, materials, etc. and determine status and needs for operations.
- Inspect all buses as functioning as may have been parked for an extended period.
- Inspect all school cafeterias and buildings.
- Survey supply vendors to determine when the supply chain and delivery system will be partially or fully operational; provide vendors with supply needs. School districts should get in touch with their county emergency manager if they foresee issues to getting PPE.
- Finance department determines the process for fast-tracking purchase orders for essential supplies.
- Determine information technology status and operational needs; this will be related to financial technology, also.
- Expand school cleaning routines by maintenance staff.
    - Disinfect all work areas, counters, restrooms, doorknobs, and stair railings several times daily; use other staff to assist. Clean all hallways, common areas, and the outside of lockers daily to a level of sanitation prescribed by the CDC.
    - Air conditioning system filters should be cleaned and changed.
    - The school should be thoroughly ventilated and cleaned: opening all doors and windows or turning the air conditioning/heating systems up.
    - Cleaning of the buses after each bus route.

Physical Health

- Recommend school nurses or designated staff compile daily health reports for the Command Team.
- Implement temperature checks and/or symptom screening when possible.

- Consider student temperature screenings for students before they enter the school and/or upon entry onto buses. If transportation drivers conduct temperature screenings, ensure emergency communication contact numbers are available to reach parents or guardians.
- Recommend CDC Practice good hygiene guidance posters (hand washing, cover while sneezing/coughing, social distancing) be visible in classrooms and common areas.
- Require handwashing in regular intervals.
- Require anyone (student and staff) with COVID-19 symptoms to stay home.
- Consider the use of face coverings for all students and staff.

Social Distancing Options:

- Consider breaking larger classes in smaller groups.
- Students may alternate school days or attend half days. Allow for cleaning time in classrooms.
- Separate student desks as much as possible. If possible, rearrange classrooms to allow for 3 feet (holding am & pm sessions/seating every other desk) or 6 feet of distancing between desks for full day sessions.
- Prohibit congregation in hall ways and lunchrooms; if possible, serve lunches in classrooms to avoid gathering of students in the cafeteria; stagger class changes to avoid large groups of students in the hallway; stagger dismissal for the same reason; cancel gym class, choir or other school activities that place individuals in close proximity or modify to allow social distancing.
- Consider reducing bus loads to allow for one student per seat.
- Keep students in the same groups or classroom, with teachers rotating when practical.
- See Appendix B for other options to encourage Social Distancing.

Resources:
New York Department of Health- Interim Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance for Primary and Secondary Schools for COVID-19
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2

Business Environment

- Human Resources and/or administrative staff will begin the process of compiling phone tree results indicating which staff members are ready to return to work, OR establish an Employee Hotline Phone Bank or website so employees can report their status (name; position; work location; health status; return to work date); use a predetermined Fitness for Duty checklist to determine if an employee is ready to return to work and under what conditions.
- Human Resources and/or administrative staff can develop a status report for each staff category by school and department: teachers, administrators, custodians, bus drivers, etc. to help determine if and when schools can reopen.
- Human Resources and/or administrative staff can provide a daily readiness report regarding certified and auxiliary staff.
- Facilities, school buses, essential equipment are inspected, cleaned and included in the readiness report.
- Communicate with vendors for resupply timelines.
- Establish a timeline and staffing threshold for opening schools and other buildings for staff, based on reports from Human Resources and/or administrative staff, building and bus

inspections, local emergency management agency, and the local health department; determine which schools can open and if temporary consolidation of schools is appropriate (which may be necessary until all employees can return to work). Include other agencies in the discussion about reopening schools, such as, public health, mental health, Fire Marshal, law enforcement, emergency management, public transportation, etc.

- Some schools may remain closed until facility and/or staffing requirements are met.
- Share timeline for opening with news media and place recordings on the school district main phone line; also add to the school district website and announce via social media.
- Revise/update the school year calendar and share with staff, parents, and news media.
- Daily reports of staff and student attendance is encouraged to be closely monitored.
- Due to financial constraints, families may relocate. Consider cautiously enrolling new students without immunization records and/or seek approval from the local health department, based on immunization and other health guidelines provided by the local health department, the Montana Department of Public Health and/or the United States Department of Health and Human Services.
- School office staff are encouraged to continually wipe down counters, faxes, copiers, telephones keyboards and use sanitized pens in the main office.
- Prevent any non-school staff, including parents, from entering school buildings.
- Check with the school liability insurance agency carrier for any liability concerns for students and staff contracting COVID-19 on school campus.

Social, Emotional and Behavioral

- Activate mental health/student support service team (school counselor, community Mental Health Partners, CSCT) to plan for students and staff, in conjunction with local mental health services staff, including post-traumatic stress syndrome counseling.
- Provide training and resources for classroom teachers on recovering from traumatic events. This information will be provided in a separate document to provide guidance and support.
- Post information on school district website and on social media for parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies (i.e., "Teaching Children How to Respond to Tragedies" from the National Association of School Psychologists).
- A mental health status report, based on guidelines provided by the counselors and the Crisis Management Team, is encouraged to be provided to the EOP and/or school administrator each day. This report can include the mental status of students and staff in order to determine if additional mental health services are needed.
- Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available.
- Consider establishing times to check-in with all staff so they feel supported and can voice concerns or seek collaborative solutions as a team. Encourage the importance and focus on self-care upon return to school building.

Resources

Trauma-Informed Care for Schools Before, During and After Emergency Events from REMS

Addressing barriers to Learning: Plan ahead to support the transition back of students, families and staff

Phase 2: Full capacity but limiting number of activities to allow for continued social distancing

Governors Order: Non-congregate group size has increased from 10 to 50 people

Recommend gatherings of groups of normal class size in shifts (recess, cafeteria and hallway passing). Larger school events that draw in-person crowds are discouraged (sports, assemblies, dances etc.) All staff are encouraged to continue monitoring for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms and be in contact with local health departments and local hospitals/health providers for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators. Continue to monitor attendance for increases in absenteeism.

Recommend a daily assessment if relaxed restrictions are resulting in a new wave of infections. **If schools at any point the answer is yes, as per the Governor's orders, schools may need to take a step back.** Continue to work in collaboration with local health officials who can help determine any level of transmission in the community.

See Appendix C Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in the Building: School Decision Tree

CONFIRMED or **SUSPECTED** case of COVID-19

- Collaborate with public health to ensure each school has a plan for reporting, contact tracing and both short-term or extended closures in the case of a positive COVID case related to the school or community.
- Utilize CDC guidelines https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html

Academic Programming

- Reinstate physical education for students but ensure P.E. teachers take on the responsibility of frequently disinfecting articles such as mats, athletic equipment BEFORE and BETWEEN classes.
- Coaches of any school teams (< 50) take on the responsibility of frequently disinfecting any athletic articles such as mats, athletic equipment BEFORE and AFTER events.

Physical & Structural Environment- No additional restructure recommendations

Business Environment

- Screen all visitors by conducting a temperature scan before entry into the main vestibule of school.

Social, Emotional Health & Behavioral

- Continue to monitor/screen staff and students for any need of additional support services.
- Continue the time for staff/student check-ins and promotion of wellness strategies.
- Continue to refer for support services as needed.

COVID-19 may come in waves and understand that the recovery process may repeat several times. It is highly recommended that you **always be prepared** for school cancellations.

If a confirmed case has entered a school, all decisions should be made locally, in collaboration with the local public health department. Follow the CDC Consideration for School Closures

Resources:

CDC Checklist for Parents

CDC Checklist for Teachers

Phase 3: Near full capacity and full operations but with continued vigilance in health and safety best practices.

Governors Order: Return to Normal Operations

Per the Governor's orders, gatherings of larger than normal class size are allowed. Begin discussions on restructuring and resuming extra-curricular activities and afterschool programs and sports events. All staff are encouraged to continue monitoring for re-emergence of COVID-19 symptoms and be in contact with the local health department for continued updates on community re-emergence indicators. Continue to monitor attendance for increases in absenteeism.

Academic Programming – no additional restructure recommendations
Physical & Structural Environment- no additional restructure recommendations
Business Environment- no additional restructure recommendations
Social, Emotional & Behavioral

- Continue to monitor/screen staff and students for any need of additional support services.
- Continue the time for staff/student check-ins and promotion of wellness strategies.
- Continue to refer for support services as needed.

During this time, schools are encouraged to review the school EOP plan and make adjustments to their Emergency Operations Plan Infectious Disease annex as gaps are identified.

The REMS technical assistance center offers free training: SCHOOL EOPS IN-DEPTH: PLANNING FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

This document is provided by the *Montana School Safety Advisory Committee* represented by Office of Public Instruction Superintendent's Office, OPI-Health Enhancement & Safety, Montana Disaster and Emergency Services, Montana School Boards Association (MSBA), MT Department of Health and Human Services ,University of Montana Safe Schools Center, Salish Kootenai College ,Montana School Counselor Association, Lewis & Clark Public Health, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Montana Department of Justice, School Administrators of Montana (SAM), Montana Rural Education Association, Montana Small Schools Alliance, Governor's Office of Community Service, National Center for Health Care Informatics - Praxis Center, Kalispell Police Department, Butte Central, T.E.S.T., Inc, and Reflex Protect.

This document is a modified Version of *Level 7 Recovery* – Taking Steps to Reopen Schools from Pandemic Planning: Information for Georgia Public School Districts and follows the *Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Recovery Model Framework*.

APPENDIX A

School Reopening Considerations

CLEANING AND SANITATION

- Frequent disinfecting of door handles, desks and other common spaces.
- Require handwashing in regular intervals.
- Keep libraries, gyms, and playgrounds off limits unless they can be sanitized between groups.
- Provide hand sanitizer.

SICK POLICIES

- Implement temperature checks and / or symptom screening when practical.
- Require anyone (students or staff) with COVID-19 symptoms to stay home.

LIMIT CLASS SIZES

- Consider breaking larger classes into smaller groups.
- Students may alternate school days or attend for half days.

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE

- Consider use of face coverings by all staff and students
- Keep students with the same group and in the same classroom, with teachers rotating when practical.
- Consider students eating lunch in the classroom to help limit mixing of students.
- Cancel extracurricular activities.
- Prevent any non-school staff, including parents, from entering school buildings.
- Consider reducing bus loads to allow for one student per seat.

GRADUATION CEREMONIES

- Provide a live stream of graduation
- Consider limiting spectator attendance
- For larger schools, consider grouping graduates or providing multiple ceremonies
- Follow social distancing between families

ACCOMODATIONS for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group:

- Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into the at-risk category because of their age or other health risks. These individuals should have additional accommodations including: teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.
- Students who are high risk or who have family members who are high risk should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.
- Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.

CONFIRMED or **SUSPECTED** case of COVID-19

- Collaborate with public health to ensure each school has a plan for reporting, contact tracing and both short-term or extended closures in the case of a positive COVID case related to the school or community.
- Utilize CDC guidelines https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html

APPENDIX B

Source: School practices to promote social distancing in K-12 schools: review of influenza pandemic policies and practices

Table 3

Most Common Types of School Practices Discussed in Literature to Create Physical Distance Among Students Enrolled in Brick-and-Mortar Public Schools, 2000–2016

Category	Examples	# (%) (*n* = 16 articles)
Cancelling or postponing after school activities	Cancel performances, sports practices, or games	6 (38%)
Increasing space among students during in-person instruction	Move class outdoors; re-arrange desks to increase space; divide classes into smaller groups; require that students remain seated while in class	5 (31%)
Canceling classes or activities that occur within the school day with a high rate of mixing/contact	Cancel physical education class; cancel field trips; cancel choir	5 (31%)
Partial closure	Closure of one class; closure of one grade	4 (25%)
Reduced schedule	Shorter school week; shorter school day; students come on alternating days	3 (19%)
Suspending use of common areas	Lunch in class rather than in lunch room; no recess	2 (13%)
Segregating students within common areas	Require that students only eat with classmates in lunchroom; require that students stay in assigned section of school yard	1 (6%)
Reducing the load on common areas through altered scheduling	Let classes out at different times so fewer students are in the hall at any one time	1 (6%)
Implementing standard workplace social distancing measures for teachers and other staff	Reduce face to face meetings; cancel staff meetings	1 (6%)

Reducing mixing during transport	Suspend buses; discourage use of public transportation	1 (6%)

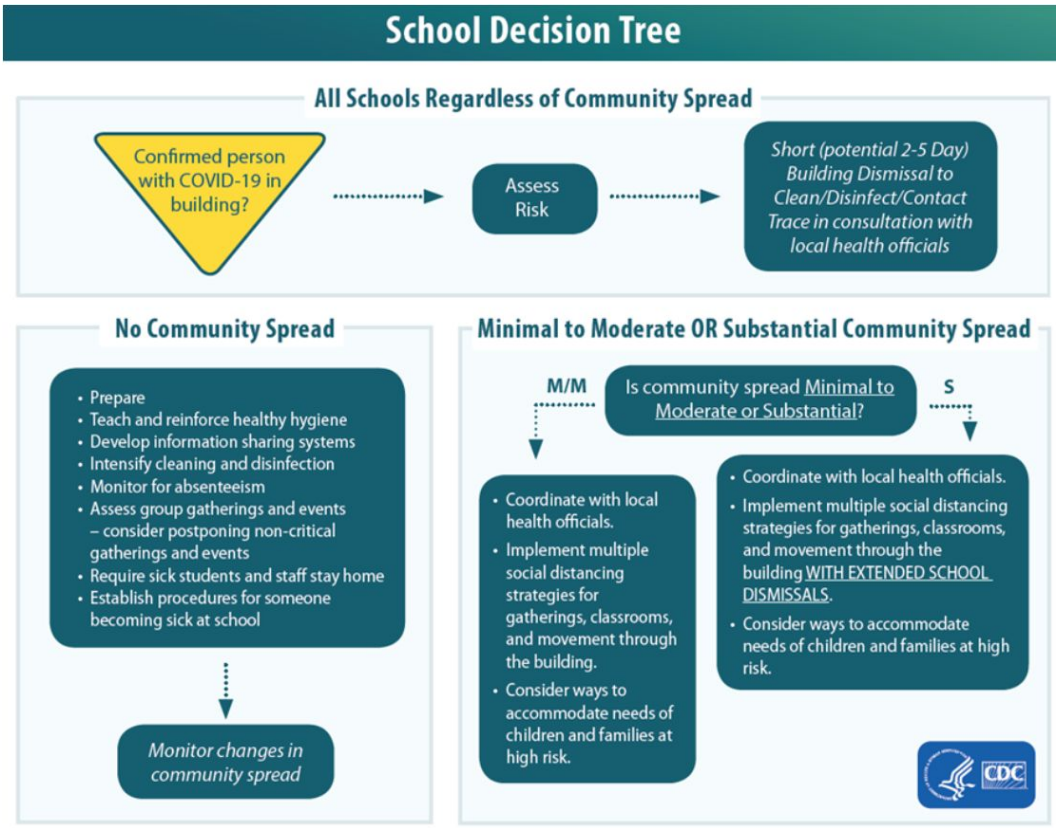
Table 6

Most Common Types of School Practices Included in State-level Guidance Documents to Create Physical Distance Among Students Enrolled in Brick-and-Mortar Public Schools

Category	Examples	# (%) (n = 16)[b]
Canceling or postponing after school activities	Cancel performances, sports practices, or games	11 (69%)
Canceling classes or activities that occur during the school day with a high rate of mixing/contact	Cancel P.E.; cancel field trips; cancel choir	7 (44%)
Reducing mixing during transport	Suspend buses; discourage use of public transportation	6 (38%)
Increasing space among students during in-person instruction	Move class outdoors; re-arrange desks to increase space; divide classes into smaller groups; require students to remain seated in classroom	5 (31%)
Reduced schedule	Shorter school week; shorter school day; students come on alternating days	4 (25%)
Suspending use of common areas	Lunch in classrooms rather than in lunch room; no recess	4 (25%)
Implementing standard workplace social distancing measures for teachers and other staff	Limit face to face meetings; cancel staff meetings	3 (19%)
Partial Closure	Closure of one class; closure of one grade	2 (13%)
Instituting home room stay **a**	Children remain with one group of children all day and teachers rotate through the room	2 (13%)
Segregating students within common areas	Require that students only eat with classmates in lunchroom; require that students stay in assigned section of school yard	1 (6%)
Reducing density/load in common areas through altered scheduling	Let classes out at different times so fewer students are in the hall at any one time	1 (6%)

Limiting visitors **a**	Do not allow parents or other visitors; restrict vendor access to school	1 (6%)

a School practice mentioned only in pandemic plans/guidance and not in the published literature

b 16 state-level guidance documents mentioned one or more school practices to promote social distancing

APPENDIX C