

ARKANSAS

# SCHOOL REOPENING MATRIX

Core principals and expectations for the safe reopening of school buildings as determined by Arkansas public school educators



**aea**

ARKANSAS EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION

Return to Learn Committee Recommendations



## CORE PRINCIPLES

There is much about the COVID-19 pandemic that we do not know, but it is our responsibility to make decisions based on what we do know. Arkansas students and educators have less than 2 weeks before the state is set to reopen schools to in-person learning. We ask state and local leaders to join the Arkansas Education Association to maximize this time to ensure that we keep students and educators safe, and prepare for a new way to deliver education and support until we can get this virus under control. Arkansas still has widespread community transmission of this deadly virus. We also know that the testing capacity and turnaround time on results has been too low and too slow to be an effective mitigation strategy. In addition, we have a positivity rate that is far too high. We have also learned that virus transmission increases in places where people are together in close proximity for prolonged amounts of time.

Looking toward the upcoming school year, schools should not consider reopening to onsite/in-person instruction if the following four core principles cannot be met.

### HEALTH EXPERTISE AND SAFETY

ALL DECISIONS TO REOPEN SCHOOLS MUST BE BASED ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE AND ADVICE FROM HEALTH EXPERTS.

### EDUCATOR VOICE

EDUCATORS MUST BE FULLY ENGAGED IN DECISION MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REOPENING PLANS.

### PROTECTION, RESOURCES AND TRAINING

STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS MUST HAVE ACCESS TO PROPER PPE AND TRAINING ON HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS.

### LEADING WITH EQUITY

EQUITY MUST BE AT THE CENTER OF WHAT WE DO. FUNDING AND OTHER RESOURCES MUST BE ALLOCATED TO HELP CLOSE GAPS EXACERBATED BY THE DISPARATE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES.

## HEALTH EXPERTISE AND SAFETY

### EXPECTATIONS

ALL DECISIONS TO REOPEN SCHOOLS MUST BE BASED ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE AND ADVICE FROM HEALTH EXPERTS.

Last week, when asked to comment on the science behind the assumption that we can start school without creating a huge increase in cases, Interim Health Secretary Jose Romero responded that there is no science to support this. His full comment was, “We don’t have the science because we’ve never tried this before. The theory is that if we maintain good contact precautions, that is the masking, the social distancing, the hand washing, we may be able to go forward with in-class education. But you are correct, we haven’t proven this. And we can have an increase in the number of cases...” The Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has already warned against statewide reopening of schools.

The health and safety of students, educators and our school community must be central to all decision making regarding plans for the 20/21 school year.

Medical experts should advise when we open schools, but educators must decide how we open schools.

All educators must be provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure safety while in school settings.

School nurses or medically-trained designee should be provided a clear plan of action when children present symptoms similar to COVID-19. The plan should include quarantine instructions, updated emergency contact information for each student, any reporting requirements, and protocol for preventing contact with other medically fragile students and educators.

Districts should create special protocols for students and educators who are at higher risk from COVID-19.

Districts should develop protocols for classes with high exposure risks like music, chorus, band, etc. to include possible reduction in class sizes or relocating to larger areas to allow for increased social distancing.

A quarantine area should be established and set up in each school to be used at the direction of the school nurse.

Hand sanitizing stations should be available throughout each school, central office, maintenance facility, and transportation areas.

To reduce contact exposure, educators should rotate classrooms instead of students changing classes. If not possible, a procedure for sanitizing desks between classes should be established.

Student desks should be face forward to prevent extended face-to-face contact. Plexiglass should be installed between students’ desks to protect everyone from exposure, when possible. Small groups and circles in elementary grades should make sure to keep socially distanced while interacting as a group.

All meetings should be done remotely when possible to limit the amount of exposure. This includes staff meetings, department meetings, IEP meetings, and parent-teacher conferences.

Districts should employ additional nursing staff to design, review and implement safety protocols.

Any district personnel with medically documented underlying conditions who are designated to perform duties that may cause them to come in direct contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 should be allowed to opt out of performing these duties without penalty or punishment.



# EDUCATOR VOICE

## EXPECTATIONS

EDUCATORS MUST BE FULLY ENGAGED IN DECISION MAK-  
ING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REOPENING PLANS.

We must listen to educator voice. AEA recently released the results of a statewide poll of educa-  
tors that showed 90% of respondents are extremely concerned about the safety of returning to  
onsite/in-person learning for the entire school community.

Educator voice must be central in all decisions they  
are being asked to implement.

Educators who are providing in-person onsite  
instruction should not also be directed, required,  
or requested to teach remote classes beyond their  
normal teaching workday.

Bus drivers are not health care professionals and  
should not be given the responsibility to determine  
student health including but not limited to taking  
temperatures, asking about symptoms, etc.

Custodians should not be required, directed, or  
requested to do any additional cleaning or sanitizing  
beyond their normal work hours without additional  
compensation.

Sanitizing of classrooms or any other part of the  
school buildings or school grounds should not be  
added to the duties of school staff who did not have  
these duties prior to the public health emergency.

School staff should never have to pay out of their  
own pocket for any cleaning, sanitation or PPE sup-  
plies.

All meetings should be done remotely when possible  
to limit the amount of exposure. This includes staff  
meetings, department meetings, IEP meetings, and  
parent-teacher conferences.

All school districts should develop a clear plan of  
action in the event of the transition to all-school  
remote learning, including triggers for the transition,  
a contingency plan for the transition, and a commu-  
nication plan for students, educators, and the local  
school community. The plan should be distributed to  
all employees, parent organizations, and local com-  
munity leaders.

Any district personnel with medically documented  
underlying conditions who are designated to per-  
form duties that may cause them to come in direct  
contact with a suspected or confirmed case of CO-  
VID-19 should be allowed to opt out of performing  
these duties without penalty or punishment.

# PROTECTION RESOURCES TRAINING

## EXPECTATIONS

STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS MUST HAVE ACCESS TO PROPER PPE  
AND TRAINING ON HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS.

Students and educators must have access to proper personal protective equipment and training on appropriate health and safety  
practices and protocols before considering a return to onsite/in-person learning. Further, the cost for these supplies must never  
fall on students, their families or educators.

Students and educators must have access to Protection and Training. The Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Educa-  
tion just released their own survey of school districts that showed only 30 percent of Arkansas school districts have the personal  
protective equipment needed to even begin to consider reopening schools. Even if schools have all of the PPE and cleaning sup-  
plies needed to follow the state's health guidelines, they need time to train staff on how to properly implement them.

Training should not be limited to health and safety protocols. It should include training on implementing new instructional strate-  
gies to meet the educational needs of our students. Educators, parents and students will require training to fully engage and re-  
spond to the new platforms being adopted by the individual school districts in providing blended learning in response to COVID.

Educators should be provided with the necessary sanitizers and  
cleansers to maintain a clean and sanitized environment for the  
students.

Custodians and maintenance workers should be provided  
protective wear and proper cleaning tools for any emergency  
cleaning required.

In the cafeteria, plexiglass should be installed in locations where  
child nutrition staff and students interact.

Plexiglass should be installed in front offices to protect clerical  
staff from exposure.

School districts should provide the necessary technology for  
students and educators to engage in remote learning where  
required and to attend and/or host necessary meetings.

In addition to devices, school districts should provide consistent  
and reliable technological support to address device mainte-  
nance, performance and connectivity issues and differentiated  
training for all stakeholders to ensure engagement in the learn-  
ing process.

Bus drivers should be given a clear plan on what to do if a child  
is sick when boarding a bus. Plexiglass should be installed to  
protect the driver from exposure.

Custodians and maintenance workers should be provided  
protective wear and proper cleaning tools for any emergency  
cleaning required.

School nurses or medically-trained designee should be provided  
a clear plan of action when children present symptoms similar  
to COVID-19. The plan should include quarantine instructions,  
updated emergency contact information for each student, any  
reporting requirements, and protocol for preventing contact  
with other medically fragile students and educators.

Schools should post a list of all cleaning and sanitizing products  
used in each school building so everyone in the school com-  
munity is aware of what chemicals are being introduced into the  
teaching and learning environment.

District administrators should work with nurses and school  
administrators to provide training for educators on health and  
safety protocols and the school safety plan including guidelines  
on proper social distancing, hand sanitizing, and PPE require-  
ments.

District administrators should work with nurses and school  
administrators to develop and implement procedures to check  
for signs and symptoms of students and educators daily upon  
arrival. Develop procedures for when a student or educator  
contracts COVID-19.

All school districts should develop a clear plan of action in the  
event of the transition to all-school remote learning, including  
triggers for the transition, a contingency plan for the transition,  
and acommunication plan for students, educators, and the local  
school community. The plan should be distributed to all employ-  
ees, parent organizations, and local community leaders.



# LEADING WITH EQUITY

## EXPECTATIONS

FUNDING AND OTHER RESOURCES MUST BE ALLOCATED TO HELP CLOSE GAPS EXACERBATED BY THE DISPARATE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES.

No matter what the 2020-2021 school year looks like equity must be at the center of what we do. This pandemic has not been experienced equally by all communities and all populations. Funding and other resources must be allocated to help close the gaps exacerbated by the disparate impact of school closures.

We must use the next three weeks to work together to support the students and educators of Arkansas and do so using an equity lens. This means that we need to find new ways to ensure our student needs are met. This will take the entire school community stepping up to connect with students; check on their physical and emotional well-being; make sure they have food and other basic needs met as well as a well-designed plan for educational enrichment that has equity at its core.

School districts should provide the necessary technology for students and educators to engage in remote learning where required and to attend and/or host necessary meetings.

In addition to devices, school districts should provide consistent and reliable technological support to address device maintenance, performance and connectivity issues and differentiated training for all stakeholders to ensure engagement in the learning process.

Districts should develop protocols for classes with high exposure risks like music, chorus, band, etc. to include possible reduction in class sizes or relocating to larger areas to allow for increased social distancing.

Increase staffing (specialized instructional support personnel like school counselors, school social work-

ers, school psychologists, etc.) necessary to support students' social and emotional well-being.

School mental health professionals can perform their job function instead of working on administrative duties.

All staff should be trained on how to identify students struggling with trauma and refer them to mental health professionals for additional support.

Districts should employ additional social workers to assist with building stronger connections with families and communities to better equip them to support student learning and engage them on supports to ease the transition back to school.

Districts should employ additional nursing staff to design, review and implement safety protocols.



## SUMMARY

In summary, when we look at the state-reported data about this virus and listen to health experts and educators it is clear: We are simply not ready to reopen schools to onsite/in-person instruction statewide. Arkansas has not yet contained this virus enough to safely reopen our schools to onsite/in-person learning. While we agree that onsite/in-person education is the best thing for students, moving kids and educators in and out of school based on isolation and quarantine protocols will be too risky and too disruptive to the teaching and learning environment. Let's work together to maximize the next two weeks to ensure that we keep students and educators safe, and prepare for a new way to deliver education and support until we can get this virus under control. The Arkansas Education Association calls on state and local leaders to join us in making a conscientious decision to protect the safety and well-being of the students and educators across the state of Arkansas.





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