SOUTH CAROLINA'S
Dedication to Education
Safe, Steady Steps Forward

A South Carolina teacher recently commented, "What we did over the last three months really wasn't distance learning, it was more emergency deployed instruction."

When this pandemic struck, we were all in uncharted territory. We had to quickly absorb and adapt to how the difficulties, challenges and disruptions that are a result of COVID-19 pandemic would affect every aspect of our lives – including education.

Side-by-side, however, thousands of teachers, administrators, staff, students and families responded by digging in, rising to the occasion and creatively improvising, all in the name of providing the best education possible for students during the unknown. Still, no one would argue that there is a replacement for in-person, classroom instruction.

That was March 2020, and we've come a long way since then. As we look toward the SC Fall school plan and the SC 2020-2021 school year, much has changed, which means there is even more to examine, plan for and safeguard.

Planning for a new school year, in even the most normal of circumstances, is challenging enough. Clearly, this SC 2020-21 school year poses unique challenges and uncontrollable variables that raise questions we have never before needed to answer.

The first thing you should know is that all our focus, and every single one of our priorities, are directed toward **protecting the health, safety and wellness** of students and staff while giving students the **best possible learning experience** that is as close to normal as health and safety allow.
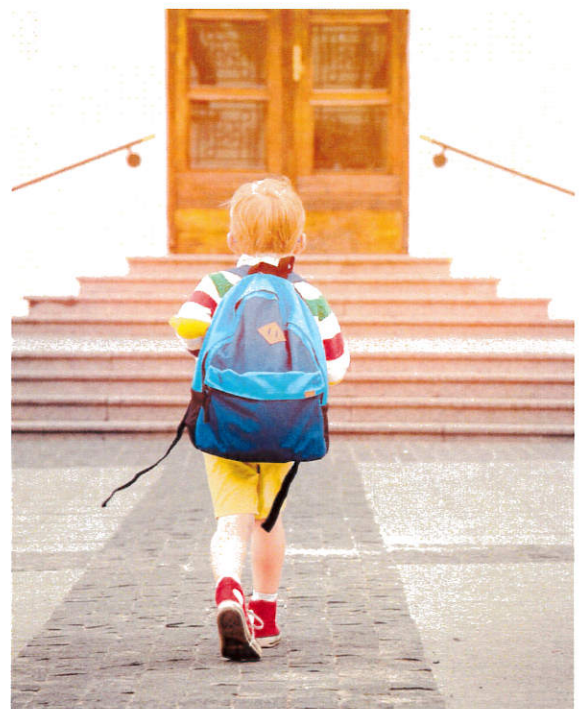
To help assist everyone in these efforts, State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman convened **AccelerateED**, a task force of educators and administrators who represent all aspects of the K-12 public education system.

During the task force's first meeting on April 30, 2020, Superintendent Spearman asked members to examine challenges to school operations and student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and make recommendations for how schools and districts could best combat and overcome these obstacles to serve students and families.

After another 25 meetings, the task force drafted a document with in-depth considerations and recommendations, but only after thorough, detailed and candid conversations.

THE TASK FORCE:

- Worked closely with the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and referred to the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

- Examined the science and research related to the Coronavirus.

- Sought advice from a variety of additional external experts.

- Applied their collective expertise.

Just below is a summary that highlights key excerpts from the full plan. You can see the full plan **here.**

Please note that we encourage you to review the full report should you have questions about the summary that highlights key excerpts. The summary is not meant to convey the task force's fully detailed recommendations. In determining how to properly execute a re-opening plan for Fall 2020-2021, we understand that these are not perfect solutions for every student, family, teacher or school district. In a pandemic, perfect solutions don't exist.

However, despite the impossibility of projecting health conditions with any certainty, today we understand more and know more about how to safely operate and achieve significantly broader safety levels for everyone.

Only through a collective commitment from everyone in the state, including schools, teachers, parents, families, students, community organizations and the public/private sectors, will there be success.

School is not going to look the same regardless of what shape and form of in-class or distance learning model is adopted. Contingencies will need to be made. Acceptance and understanding will need to be universal. The discipline and habits of people will need to change.

From rural and urban communities, to working parents and families needing childcare, every district in our state is different. Each represents unique challenges to learning, scheduling and budgets. Knowing routines will be disrupted, AccelerateED designed recommendations to provide flexibility for school and district decision making that help get students at all levels back to school safely.

While the optimal learning environment for most students would be in-person instruction, **we must acknowledge that what's reality now, may not be the same in August**, nor the ideal educational model that works best throughout the year.

Right now, we live in an everchanging environment and the course of future actions depends on the course this pandemic takes. What we do know, however, is the resilience and pride South Carolinians have in their state and for their students, is an essential factor in overcoming any obstacles and challenges we face along the way. We all want our students back in school, and we can all contribute to getting back to learning, safely and comfortably.

We all want our students back in school. This broader overview was created to focus on key excerpts and demonstrate how we can all contribute to safely and comfortably get back to learning.

PHASE ONE: IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

There are a myriad of actions, operational executions and processes that must happen now. It's imperative that districts use the early summer to establish frameworks and best practices. Doing so will help them be fully prepared for any scenario that affects the resumption of school in the Fall and lead to constructive, effective learning for each and every student.

STATE GOVERNMENT & AGENCIES

Establishment of health condition levels for schools

To best guide district decision making, the SCDE should collaborate with DHEC to develop clear criteria for defining the rate of COVID-19 spread. Districts need clear guidance from our public health authorities to determine whether an area's condition is low, medium or high spread.

Health and safety infrastructure grants

Many school buildings will need physical enhancements to improve health and safety for students and staff. As a result, the General Assembly should consider the creation of a Health and Safety Infrastructure Grant to make additional resources available to districts.

Purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

We have recommended that the Department of Administration and the Emergency Management Division take the lead in PPE procurement and create a state implementation plan for a stockpile of PPE to take advantage of the state's buying power.

COMMUNICATIONS

Local task force and two-way communication

A local team or task force should be established with diverse community representation that creates a constructive feedback loop. This should include opportunities to express experiences with distance learning, new safety protocols and the potential impact of proposed school operations.

HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Survey of staff

Districts should survey staff ASAP to identify those with conditions that could prevent their return to normal, in-person job duties in fall 2020. The information should be used to develop plans that meet students' instructional needs, while protecting staff health.

Preparing for staff social and emotional needs

Prepare for social, emotional and mental health needs by establishing response teams. Also, consider establishing triage protocols and evaluating the ability to respond to the unexpected.

FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Addressing the digital divide

The SCDE and districts should work throughout the summer to use available resources to provide digital access (devices and broadband) for as many students and staff as possible by the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Continue wraparound supports

Throughout the summer, districts should seek the continuation of wraparound supports for students, such as school meals and access to counseling.

INSTRUCTION & STUDENT SERVICES

Determining student attendance

A recent national survey found that a significant number of parents are "very likely" to choose a home option for Fall instruction, even if schools reopen. Given this data, it's imperative that districts start the 2020-21 school year with an appropriate a plan.

EARLY SURVEY OF PARENT FAMILY PREFERENCES

Survey families about their intentions and needs when it comes to sending their children back to school. It is important for districts to provide clear, consistent and transparent communications to families about districts' plans for multiple contingencies.

DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT POLICY FOR DISTANCE LEARNING ACCESS

It's almost certain that 100 percent will not choose, or be able to, come back to class in person. During the summer, districts will need to develop policies on criteria that determine student eligibility for distance/remote learning.

PHASE TWO: SUMMER PLANNING & PREPARATION

Resuming school operations will require districts to adjust traditional planning. To prepare for Fall instruction, districts should work to address the following recommendations during the mid-Summer period, the month of July after the July 4th holiday.

STATE GOVERNMENT & AGENCIES

The state must work to provide districts with adequate funding and flexibility to meet local needs and focus on student learning. The SCDE and General Assembly should:

- Address the amount of funding the state provides to help districts' account for the increased costs they are incurring due to added COVID-19 protocols.

- Provide a waiver from state and federally mandated standardized tests.

- Provide a waiver for certification renewal.

- Provide alternative pathways and funding for student service providers.

- Review emergency drill procedures.

- Develop a school health and safety sharing website.

- Develop additional distance learning resources.

COMMUNICATIONS

Review school calendars

Districts should determine the best start date for their local situation.

School calendar

Schools may want to re-evaluate the calendar for the entire year by consulting with staff, families and community partners. Alterations could include:

● **START DATE**

Determine a start date that is best aligned to local health situation, which may be considering pushing back the start date – especially to better accommodate the LEAP days.

Create a "year-round" calendar with nine weeks of instruction followed by a two-week break for greater schedule flexibility in the event of a second wave of COVID-19.

● **EXTENDED WINTER BREAK**

This model is similar to what some universities in the state are planning. It includes the elimination of all holidays prior to Thanksgiving and students not reporting back to campus from Thanksgiving through the start of the second semester in January 2021. For use in K-12 education, this would most likely require a period of distance learning during December 2020.

● **SCHEDULING BY SEMESTER**

Districts may find it useful to engage in semester calendar discussions and/or approval, rather than passing an entire school year calendar.

Scheduling distance learning practice days

All districts should include in their calendar one or two distance learning practice days during the first nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year.

DISTANCE LEARNING CONTINGENCY PLAN

Districts should enter the new school year with a clear plan to implement in the event of a return to full distance learning. The plan should include the minimum criteria set forth by the task force.

UPDATE ON PLANNING FOR REOPENING

For student, family, and staff clarity, districts should provide an overview of their scheduling and operational plans to their community at least 20 days in advance of the scheduled first day of the 2020-21 school year. Districts should communicate that plans will likely change as new information becomes available.

HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE, & ADMINISTRATION

In addition to their traditional summer work of filling vacancies, HR teams will need to determine how to address unique staffing needs resulting from COVID-19.

School nurses

Districts should strive to provide a permanent, full time nurse position at each school.

Supporting and partnering with educator preparation programs

It is imperative to districts to help the future teaching workforce by providing access to clinical experiences and instructional technology, flexibility for teacher cadets and to work with the SCDE to grant maximum flexibility on instructional hour requirements.

Insurance coverage and leave policies

Districts should reach out to their insurance carriers to discuss liability coverage and should update their leave policy to align with federal COVID-19 leave policy changes.

Emergency contact information

Encourage staff to update contact information, verify the health and safety of employee and employee families and communicate to staff a return-to-work plan at the beginning of the school year and/or for other necessary returns.

Budget review

Districts should review and potentially revise their budget planning for the 2020-21 school year and build in contingencies that address funding or potential lack of state funding for cleaning, supplies, PPE, etc.

Contingency leadership planning

Districts should develop an alternative command structure that can be implemented if administrative and/or key employees are unable to work.

(cont.) HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Review of attendance incentives and penalties

Districts should review and consider discontinuing attendance incentive programs for staff and students to diminish pressure for individuals to report to school when feeling ill. Similarly, districts should review policies and procedures included in handbooks and athletic codes of conduct to remove punitive measures for absences when a student is experiencing symptoms of, or has potentially been exposed to, COVID-19.

Health reporting

Districts should develop a health reporting process for the fall to ensure that the superintendent and district office are informed about daily health conditions in schools.

Job description review

As able, districts should seek to review and revise job descriptions to better account for duties and expectations for future prolonged periods of school closure and distance learning.

FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Cleaning protocols

Districts should develop cleaning protocols based on the latest DHEC, CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidance and determine if the volume can be handled by custodial staff or should be supplemented with contracted services.

Resources for classroom and facility reconfiguration

The South Carolina chapters of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association for Learning Environments (A4LE) have offered to host a series of webinars on how to reconfigure classrooms and other spaces to create more distance between students.

Cleaning and facility preparation

Review the plan and supply inventory to thoroughly clean and disinfect all buildings, desks, buses, equipment, and other surfaces prior to students and/or staff returning using CDC, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and OSHA guidelines.

Safety plans

Districts and schools should review and revise school safety plans to account for new risks associated with COVID-19.

Review of potential costs of changes to food service

Social distancing guidelines and other health requirements are likely to require schools to revise the way meals are served and eaten. As a result, districts should conduct an analysis of the potential increased costs related to required changes for supplies, packing, and cleaning.

Visitation policies

Districts should engage in a comprehensive review of school visitation policies. These policies should minimize outside guests from entering instructional areas while maintaining safe access for essential non-employees.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Facilities use plan

Districts should engage in a comprehensive review of policies regarding use of school facilities by outside groups to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19.

Review of transportation capacity

Districts should conduct an analysis of their capacity to meet projected transportation needs in the fall, including running practice bus routes, based on the most current guidance from DHEC about maximum bus occupancy.

INSTRUCTION & STUDENT SERVICES

Plan for fall distance learning groups

Districts should use the data from their parents/guardians and staff surveys during the early summer phase to project potential distance learning needs for the start of 2020-21. It is imperative that districts avoid situations where teachers are required to plan and implement instruction for students via in-person and distance settings during the same day. Incorporating any or all of the below options can help accomplish this.

- **Distance learning sections**

  If staffing permits, districts could assign staff to a full distance learning schedule for students who will not return to in-person instruction. Districts should first seek to staff distance learning classes with teachers who are uncomfortable returning to work and consider teacher aptitude and skills for leading distance learning.

- **Live streaming of classes**

  Districts could furnish classrooms with the equipment necessary to livestream daily instruction to students participating from home.

- **Asynchronous learning**

  Districts could provide instruction through asynchronous means as necessary. Districts should prioritize acquiring the needed technology so that students can access the wealth of learning materials online.

DECLARATION OF INTENT

By late July, districts should have guidelines in place to determine student eligibility for distance learning. Districts should share these guidelines with families, as well as the district's safety protocols and anticipated scheduling model for the fall. Based on these items, families should be allowed to apply for distance learning services. Districts should clearly communicate to parents that those applying for a full distance-learning would only be able to return to in-person instruction if space is available.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Districts should seek to streamline professional learning opportunities and align those topics to address the unique challenges staff will face.

COMPLETION OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS

With the sudden closure of schools, many evaluations of student needs were not completed. To best prepare for upcoming school operations, districts should seek to complete as many of these evaluations as possible.

Special Education

When able, districts should begin conducting eligibility meetings, individualized education programs (IEP) meetings, and other meetings once all required components have been gathered. For students with disabilities, for whom it would not be safe to return to school, the IEP team will need to determine how services might be delivered in a safe environment.

English learners

The existing screening tool for English learners under federal requirements is an in-person tool. As a result, districts must make sure to comply with existing DHEC regulations regarding physical distance and properly sanitize all technology used. Districts should also continue to communicate with parents and family members in their home language.

PREPARING FOR THE SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Schools and districts should review their current state-mandated multi-tier system of supports, designed to help schools identify struggling students early and to intervene quickly. Districts should create committees focused on addressing student social emotional needs. The committee would work to identify all available resources in the district and how those resources can be combined to provide the best possible programming for students and staff.

PREVENTION OF BULLYING & HARASSMENT

While schools have focused on bullying prevention, the impact of the pandemic on society will necessitate that districts and schools revisit their policies and procedures to account for potential new sources of bullying and harassment. Addressing these new potential areas requires the same vigilance and consistency as what schools apply to mitigate other forms of bullying – both in person and digitally.

PHASE THREE: PRE-OPENING

While there is no way students can gain back everything lost during the final months of the 2019-2020 school year, we can, and should, take steps to ensure students are as prepared as possible for the 2020-21 school year. The focus should be on increasing learning rather than making up lost days.

This Pre-Opening Phase should take place about **two weeks prior** to the scheduled start of the school year. It will be critical for a successful return to school.

Communications

Districts should use clear communications about safety protocols and procedures.

Back to school events

Due to health conditions, schools may be unlikely to host traditional, in-person back-to-school events for large groups of students and community members. As a result, districts should develop plans for how to deliver these same types of experiences through digital, TV or other resources.

HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Staff training

Districts should evaluate existing annual training to determine if some topics can be streamlined or eliminated to increase available time for addressing new, COVID-related procedures.

FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Allocation of classroom furniture and materials

In the weeks leading to the start of school, districts and schools should evaluate furniture and materials in all classrooms to ensure rooms comply with health requirements – based on existing social distancing guidelines of six feet between desks.

INSTRUCTION & STUDENT SERVICES

The South Carolina General Assembly is currently debating appropriating a significant portion of funding to allow for five additional days at the start of the 2020-2021 school year for students in grades Pre-K through 8th grade. The additional Learn, Evaluate, Analyze and Prepare (LEAP) days are not intended to address all instructional content missed in the spring of 2020. These days should be used to prepare schools to return to operations.

Which students should attend?

The funding provided to districts is specifically for all students in grades Pre-K through 8th grade. Districts should place the highest priority on engaging students with significant learning gaps or specialized needs, such as students who:

- Experienced low engagement during the 2020 distance learning period.

- Have demonstrated learning gaps on prior assessments and diagnostic tools.

- Are in process for evaluation related to special education or English learner status.

- Are homeless or migrant.

WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD OCCUR DURING LEARNING PREPARATION DAYS?

In planning for LEAP days, districts should develop a clear plan to document and communicate activities and desired outcomes. These may include:

L Learn- Revisiting prior content and skills

E Evaluate- Diagnostic activities and review of IEPs

A Analyze- Data analysis

P Prepare- Social and emotional preparation, professional development, and establishing routines and procedures

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHECK-IN/SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING PLAN (SEL PLAN)

All school staff and students need an initial "check-in" to process any trauma of COVID-19 and school closures. There are free resources available which can be vetted and posted by the SCDE. Guidance should also be provided on appropriate community partnerships to support mental and emotional health for all school stakeholders.

PHASE FOUR: RE-OPENING

Re-opening and continuity of operations

This phase outlines recommended procedures and protocols that should be implemented and followed as students and staff return for the 2020-21 school year. These recommendations should not only be applied at the start, but also throughout the school year.

COMMUNICATIONS

Preventative measures

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses, districts and schools must have plans in place to ensure sick employees and students stay home. This should extend to encouraging and insisting that students and employees remain home if someone in the household has COVID-19 symptoms or is being tested for COVID-19. Communications should also share district policies on health requirements for exclusion from and return to school.

HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Class coverage due to staff absences

Districts and schools should have clearly defined plans for addressing staff shortages on a day-to-day basis.

Reporting protocol

Districts/schools should develop a clear protocol of responsibilities for reporting positive cases of COVID-19 to the district office, the SCDE, local health department and school community.

FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

In the event that all or some students can report to school for in-person instruction, the following recommendations should be considered:

Building considerations

To comply with health regulations, districts should consider altering ordinary operations and facilities use, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Exterior and interior signs that clearly show how to stop the spread and describe COVID-19 symptoms, good hygiene and school/district specific protocols. Clear, simple instructions for any actions, including reminders to not come to school if one is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or illness.

- Increasing areas/physical spaces to reduce student bottlenecks.

- Stagger entry and release times. This may require extending the school day.

- Turn off water fountains and provide bottled water or allow students and staff to bring water bottles from home.

- Create lines for increased spacing and traffic directions in hallways to designate flow paths.

- Increase spaces between desks and have them facing the same direction maintaining 6 feet of distance to the extent possible.

- Mark social distancing spaces on floors in areas such as cafeterias or restrooms.

- Spaced seating in cafeterias and longer meal periods if other options, such as pre-packaged meals served in classrooms, are not feasible.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Transportation

Under current DHEC guidance in our state, buses should not be filled beyond 50 percent capacity, where practical. In addition, districts should implement health and safety standards such as:

- Establishing protocols to promote social distancing of students from different families at bus stops, during loading, during transport and while unloading.

- Providing hand sanitizers for students and drivers.

- Providing face masks for drivers, and permitting masks and face coverings for students.

- Cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas at least once per day.

- Recommendations contained in the CDC Guidance for Bus Transit Operators.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Student and staff health protocols

Schools should have clearly established health protocols for students and staff. These protocols should be clearly communicated in advance of the start of school to students, families and staff.

COVID-19 case on campus

Districts should establish predetermined thresholds for mitigation strategies in the event of a reported case of COVID-19 on campus. These strategies should establish clear steps for responding to positive, on-campus student or staff cases and be made by consulting the interim Management of Suspect/Confirmed Cases guidance from DHEC.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Meal service

Districts should develop plans for student meals for any scheduling model and consider the following:

FULL DISTANCE LEARNING (NO ONE IN THE BUILDING)

- Provide PPE and establish social distancing protocols to ensure the safety while preparing, delivering or picking-up meals.

- Develop capacity to provide a week's worth of meals at a time.

HYBRID OR "TRADITIONAL" MODELS

- Provide hand sanitizer for all students and staff.

- Position hand sanitizer near vending machines, clean vending machines regularly.

- Provide PPE for all food service staff.

- Conduct thorough cafeterias cleaning and high-touch areas throughout the day.

- Consider alternative meal serving models that enhance capacity for social distancing, such as staggered lunch periods or serving meals in classrooms.

- In the event of an A/B schedule, where students do not report to campus each day, develop a plan to provide to-go meals to cover students' "off" days.

- Eliminate serving procedures similar to family- style meals or prohibitand food sharing.

- To the extent possible, seek to provide meals that are bagged or boxed with all necessary utensils, condiments, etc. to minimize handling.

- Eliminate self-serve food items.

- Install sneeze guards or similar measures in serving lines and limit cash transactions.

- Develop plans to servefor students, who have heightened medical risks, separately from other students.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Face masks and PPE for students/staff

It is expected that school districts allow students and staff to wear masks as a necessary protection of themselves and others. Districts should follow the latest mask-wearing guidance from DHEC and the CDC.

STUDENTS AND STAFF

Districts should review dress code and other relevant policies to ensure students and staff can wear cloth face masks and other PPE.

STAFF

The SCDE has purchased cloth face masks for all teachers for the coming school year. Some staff may be required to wear additional PPE. If additional PPE is necessary for job duties, it may be necessary for schools to provide the required PPE.

(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Nurses stations and clinical spaces

Students or staff that are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should **not** be treated in the same space used for all other non-COVID medical conditions. Schools should develop a separate room where students or staff, who are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, can be evaluated and/or wait for pick-up. This room should adhere to strict health and safety guidelines.

Playgrounds and recess

Districts should evaluate recess procedures to maximize social distancing and reduce shared surface touching. These procedures could include alternate recess schedules and provide for time to disinfect equipment between uses.

Staff meetings

Districts and schools should evaluate policies on staff meetings. Whenever possible, schools should seek to use video conferencing or other resources.

Staff workspace

Districts and schools should evaluate shared teacher workspaces to ensure adequate social distancing and limit capacity in common areas.

INSTRUCTION & STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Extending learning

Some federal funds that have been carried over from the 2019-2020 school year could be used to extend learning activities for students throughout the 2020-21 school year.

GRADING PRACTICES

Students will be entering the 2020-21 school year after experiencing disruption to one quarter of the prior school year. As a result, districts should re-evaluate grading practices in order to implement best practices that are best aligned to promote student remediation, growth and mastery.

ENSURING A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

Due to the challenges brought on by COVID-19, it is unanimously the recommendation of this task force that districts continue to ensure students have access to a well-rounded education, both in-person and in distance learning environments, this fall.

- The Arts (visual and performing)
- Physical Education (including ROTC)
- Media Centers and Media Specialists
- Career and Technical Education (CTE)

SCHEDULING MODELS FOR REOPENING

Scheduling for the 2020-21 school year poses unique challenges that have never before been faced in our schools. It's further complicated by the impossibility of accurately projecting health conditions as well as the possibility of a resurgence of the virus in the fall.

In making scheduling decisions, districts should be guided by the following three principles:

1. While scheduling districts should always seek to provide students with the best possible learning experiences, greatest priority must be given to ensuring the health, safety, and wellness of students and staff. This requires aligning all scheduling decisions with the latest recommendation and guidance from public health officials about best practices for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

2. Districts should avoid any scheduling scenario where the burden falls on a teacher to simultaneously create and implement traditional and distance instruction for students in the same class at the same time.

3. While the optimal learning environment for most students would be in-person instruction, districts and schools should have plans in place to adjust scheduling models during the school year in the event of a decline or second wave of COVID-19 in their area. A scheduling model that works in August may not work throughout the year.

In addition, districts should carefully weigh the most up-to-date guidance from public health agencies like the CDC and DHEC. Schools are encouraged to review the CDC's Decision Tree, the CDC Considerations for Schools, the CDC FAQs for Administrators, and the CDC's Community Mitigation Strategies to determine their preparedness for reopening. With these recommendations in mind, three possible scheduling models are proposed for districts.

MODEL 1: "TRADITIONAL" SCHEDULING

In this scenario, health guidelines and facility considerations allow for all students and staff to return to a school to open the school year because there is low or no spread of COVID-19 in the area and low to no positive cases within the school building. Districts should still make modifications to their scheduling and instructional practices to mitigate continued COVID-19 risks.

Communications

Districts should engage in early, clear and consistent communications to students, families and the community about changes in standard school operations.

Class size caps

Any class size cap established by health authorities should not be exceeded. Schools should remove any student desks and seating beyond what is needed.

Teachers should limit or eliminate use of partner or group activities that require close physical proximity of students.

Schools should increase the use of large spaces throughout the entire school day, such as atriums, auditoriums, cafeterias, gyms and outside spaces.

Master schedules must continue to prioritize inclusion of students with IEPs.

(continued) MODEL 1: "TRADITIONAL" SCHEDULING

Reduction of transitions

To the greatest extent possible, districts and schools should minimize student transitions during the day, including:

- Staggered class dismissal.

- Redesigning student arrival, which may include students reporting directly to classrooms.

- Scheduling restroom breaks.

- Considering scheduling so that only teachers, rather than students, rotate between classes.

- Minimizing or eliminating gatherings such as assemblies, pep rallies, spirit nights, etc.

Modified school day (high school)

When possible, high schools should seek to provide upperclassmen with late arrival or early dismissal in place of study hall periods.

Planning for potential self-isolation periods

Districts must plan for how instruction will be conducted for students and by staff who are required to self-isolate without being ill.

MODEL 2: HYBRID SCHEDULING

Consideration of a hybrid model is about the spread rate of COVID-19 and school facilities. For example, depending on the spread rate in a particular area, districts should consider a hybrid schedule to accommodate for an insufficient number of buses, classroom square footage, etc. In this scenario, only a portion of staff and students can report to a physical school building and districts should place the highest priority on ensuring in-person instruction for the following groups:

> Pre-K and elementary.

> Students with IEPs, especially those with occupational and other physical therapy needs.

> English learners.

> High school students in CTE programs that require hands-on experiences or access to specialized equipment.

District could also consider **split-schedule models** for all students such as:

AM/PM model

Half the student body attends class in the morning or afternoon and then engages in distance learning the other half of the day.

Alternating days

Half of students attend school on Monday and Wednesday. The other half attend on Tuesday and Thursday. On Fridays, students engage in distance learning, teachers have opportunities for planning and grading and districts can engage in deep cleaning buildings.

(continued) MODEL 2: HYBRID SCHEDULING

Before adopting any hybrid schedule, districts should **consider the following questions:**

- Does the district have a plan in place for how to provide clear, consistent, and advanced communications to students, families, and the communities to help them understand the hybrid scheduling model?

- Does the district have sufficient transportation resources (buses and drivers) to execute a split-schedule?

- Does the area have sufficient childcare options to support families that will be unable to have an adult at home for days/times of day where students are engaged in distance learning?

- What is the educational impact of split scheduling on different student groups?

- How can districts minimize the burden of split-scheduling on families with multiple children in school?

- How can districts support teachers in building relationships with students?

MODEL 3: FULL DISTANCE LEARNING

In this scenario, all students and staff are unable to return to a physical school building. Districts must then rely on a full distance learning schedule. Before adopting this schedule, districts should **consider the following**:

Distance learning plan

Is there a clearly defined plan communicated to all stakeholders that includes what should be expected by and from students, teachers and families?

Building relationships

In the event of distance learning at the start of the year, districts must carefully consider ways to build relationships with students and families.

Establishment of advisory groups

Districts should consider assigning a mentoring or advisory group of students to all staff in a building.

Opportunities for two-way communication

In addition to providing regular and detailed communication to families, staff and students, districts should provide regular opportunities for collecting feedback.

Reducing transport of school materials

Districts should review practices to minimize the amount of materials passed between students and staff.

Technology assistance hubs

Districts should maintain physical locations with regular business hours where students and staff can have access to technology support.

(continued) MODEL 3: FULL DISTANCE LEARNING

Meeting the needs of special populations

Districts should be especially mindful of meeting the needs of special populations.

- **Students with IEPs**

  Consideration of how to best meet the needs of a child with an IEP through distance learning should be determined on a child-by-child basis.

- **English learners**

  In delivering distance learning for English learners, to the extent possible, districts should:

  - Reduce the ratio of ESOL instructors to students.

  - Continue to provide instructional support.

  - In the event a student's ELP has not been determined, the results of the provisional EL screening interview should be used to guide the level of support.

  - Provide both synchronous and asynchronous resources and instruction.

  - Increase access to translators and/or software that assist with translation.

  - Continue use of a co-teaching model.

  - Ensure all materials are accessible in a student's home language to encourage family engagement.

SCDE should consider the following:

- Waivers from Defined Minimum Program and Seat Time Requirements.

- Facilitating district collaboration and support of remote learning.

Moving forward

In this everchanging environment, flexibility and adaptability will help guide the course of actions we take as this pandemic continues to change shape. We have all been disrupted. We have all had to adapt. As we face the uncertain challenges ahead, nothing is more crucial than putting all our efforts and priorities toward protecting the health, safety and wellness of students and staff – all while providing the best possible education to our students.

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(continued) MODEL 2: HYBRID SCHEDULING

Before adopting any hybrid schedule, districts should **consider the following questions:**

- Does the district have a plan in place for how to provide clear, consistent, and advanced communications to students, families, and the communities to help them understand the hybrid scheduling model?

- Does the district have sufficient transportation resources (buses and drivers) to execute a split-schedule?

- Does the area have sufficient childcare options to support families that will be unable to have an adult at home for days/times of day where students are engaged in distance learning?

- What is the educational impact of split scheduling on different student groups?

- How can districts minimize the burden of split-scheduling on families with multiple children in school?

- How can districts support teachers in building relationships with students?

MODEL 3: FULL DISTANCE LEARNING

In this scenario, all students and staff are unable to return to a physical school building. Districts must then rely on a full distance learning schedule. Before adopting this schedule, districts should **consider the following**:

Distance learning plan

Is there a clearly defined plan communicated to all stakeholders that includes what should be expected by and from students, teachers and families?

Building relationships

In the event of distance learning at the start of the year, districts must carefully consider ways to build relationships with students and families.

Establishment of advisory groups

Districts should consider assigning a mentoring or advisory group of students to all staff in a building.

Opportunities for two-way communication

In addition to providing regular and detailed communication to families, staff and students, districts should provide regular opportunities for collecting feedback.

Reducing transport of school materials

Districts should review practices to minimize the amount of materials passed between students and staff.

Technology assistance hubs

Districts should maintain physical locations with regular business hours where students and staff can have access to technology support.

(continued) MODEL 3: FULL DISTANCE LEARNING

Meeting the needs of special populations

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(continued) FACILITIES, TRANSPORTATION & OPERATIONS (INCLUDING FOOD SERVICES)

Nurses stations and clinical spaces

Students or staff that are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should **not** be treated in the same space used for all other non-COVID medical conditions. Schools should develop a separate room where students or staff, who are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, can be evaluated and/or wait for pick-up. This room should adhere to strict health and safety guidelines.

Playgrounds and recess

Districts should evaluate recess procedures to maximize social distancing and reduce shared surface touching. These procedures could include alternate recess schedules and provide for time to disinfect equipment between uses.

Staff meetings

Districts and schools should evaluate policies on staff meetings. Whenever possible, schools should seek to use video conferencing or other resources.

Staff workspace

Districts and schools should evaluate shared teacher workspaces to ensure adequate social distancing and limit capacity in common areas.

INSTRUCTION & STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Extending learning

Some federal funds that have been carried over from the 2019-2020 school year could be used to extend learning activities for students throughout the 2020-21 school year.

GRADING PRACTICES

Students will be entering the 2020-21 school year after experiencing disruption to one quarter of the prior school year. As a result, districts should re-evaluate grading practices in order to implement best practices that are best aligned to promote student remediation, growth and mastery.

ENSURING A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

Due to the challenges brought on by COVID-19, it is unanimously the recommendation of this task force that districts continue to ensure students have access to a well-rounded education, both in-person and in distance learning environments, this fall.

- The Arts (visual and performing)
- Physical Education (including ROTC)
- Media Centers and Media Specialists
- Career and Technical Education (CTE)

SCHEDULING MODELS FOR REOPENING

Scheduling for the 2020-21 school year poses unique challenges that have never before been faced in our schools. It's further complicated by the impossibility of accurately projecting health conditions as well as the possibility of a resurgence of the virus in the fall.

In making scheduling decisions, districts should be guided by the following three principles:

1. While scheduling districts should always seek to provide students with the best possible learning experiences, greatest priority must be given to ensuring the health, safety, and wellness of students and staff. This requires aligning all scheduling decisions with the latest recommendation and guidance from public health officials about best practices for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

2. Districts should avoid any scheduling scenario where the burden falls on a teacher to simultaneously create and implement traditional and distance instruction for students in the same class at the same time.

3. While the optimal learning environment for most students would be in-person instruction, districts and schools should have plans in place to adjust scheduling models during the school year in the event of a decline or second wave of COVID-19 in their area. A scheduling model that works in August may not work throughout the year.

In addition, districts should carefully weigh the most up-to-date guidance from public health agencies like the CDC and DHEC. Schools are encouraged to review the CDC's Decision Tree, the CDC Considerations for Schools, the CDC FAQs for Administrators, and the CDC's Community Mitigation Strategies to determine their preparedness for reopening. With these recommendations in mind, three possible scheduling models are proposed for districts.

MODEL 1: "TRADITIONAL" SCHEDULING

In this scenario, health guidelines and facility considerations allow for all students and staff to return to a school to open the school year because there is low or no spread of COVID-19 in the area and low to no positive cases within the school building. Districts should still make modifications to their scheduling and instructional practices to mitigate continued COVID-19 risks.

Communications

Districts should engage in early, clear and consistent communications to students, families and the community about changes in standard school operations.

Class size caps

Any class size cap established by health authorities should not be exceeded. Schools should remove any student desks and seating beyond what is needed.

Teachers should limit or eliminate use of partner or group activities that require close physical proximity of students.

Schools should increase the use of large spaces throughout the entire school day, such as atriums, auditoriums, cafeterias, gyms and outside spaces.

Master schedules must continue to prioritize inclusion of students with IEPs.

(continued) MODEL 1: "TRADITIONAL" SCHEDULING

Reduction of transitions

To the greatest extent possible, districts and schools should minimize student transitions during the day, including:

- Staggered class dismissal.

- Redesigning student arrival, which may include students reporting directly to classrooms.

- Scheduling restroom breaks.

- Considering scheduling so that only teachers, rather than students, rotate between classes.

- Minimizing or eliminating gatherings such as assemblies, pep rallies, spirit nights, etc.

Modified school day (high school)

When possible, high schools should seek to provide upperclassmen with late arrival or early dismissal in place of study hall periods.

Planning for potential self-isolation periods

Districts must plan for how instruction will be conducted for students and by staff who are required to self-isolate without being ill.

MODEL 2: HYBRID SCHEDULING

Consideration of a hybrid model is about the spread rate of COVID-19 and school facilities. For example, depending on the spread rate in a particular area, districts should consider a hybrid schedule to accommodate for an insufficient number of buses, classroom square footage, etc. In this scenario, only a portion of staff and students can report to a physical school building and districts should place the highest priority on ensuring in-person instruction for the following groups:

> Pre-K and elementary.

> Students with IEPs, especially those with occupational and other physical therapy needs.

> English learners.

> High school students in CTE programs that require hands-on experiences or access to specialized equipment.

District could also consider **split-schedule models** for all students such as:

AM/PM model

Half the student body attends class in the morning or afternoon and then engages in distance learning the other half of the day.

Alternating days

Half of students attend school on Monday and Wednesday. The other half attend on Tuesday and Thursday. On Fridays, students engage in distance learning, teachers have opportunities for planning and grading and districts can engage in deep cleaning buildings.