

# **Back to School RI: Reopening Frequently Asked Questions SY20-21**

Updated 8/31/2020



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education

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Items marked with \*\*\* before the question were added or updated August 31, 2020.



## Introduction

The following questions and answers were gathered through ongoing calls, meetings, and inquiries from educators, school leaders, parents, and community members. The FAQs will continue to be updated as new questions and responses emerge.

On August 31, 2020, the “[Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island’s Elementary and Secondary Schools 2.0](#)” was released with updated health and safety information. All previous FAQs specifically related to this guidance have been included in the updated version and removed from this FAQ document. Additionally, parent friendly FAQ questions can be found on the [Back2SchoolRI.com](#) website.

We hope this FAQ confirms our vision for reopening R.I. schools:

*RIDE and RIDOH are committed to leveraging the latest public health information and best education practices to deliver innovative solutions and partnerships that ensure a safe reopening on all Prek-12 schools.*

## Wellness - Mental, Physical and Social Emotional Health

### **\*\*\*How will schools who enroll students from multiple communities determine their reopening scenario?**

Schools in this situation (non-public special education programs, charter schools, private schools, CTE programs, etc.) should utilize the reopening scenario provided by the Governor that applies to the majority of the students they serve. For example, if 50% or more of the student population comes from an LEA that is able to reopen partially (Providence and Central Falls as of 8/31/20), the school should open with a partial reopening scenario. If the majority of the school population is not from one of these two LEAs, the school is able to open in the full in-person scenario. If a school is unsure of the best scenario to utilize for reopening, they should reach out to RIDE for consultation at [info@ride.ri.gov](mailto:info@ride.ri.gov).

### **\*\*\*What are the guidelines for Preschool or RI PreK Classrooms?**

LEAs should refer to the [RI Pre-K COVID-19 Reopening Guidance](#). The RIDE Pre-K team will reach out to work directly with state funded pre-k programs in collaboration with DHS to ensure consistency across the system.

### **\*\*\*Will there be training for school nurses and school staff over the summer?**

School Nurses: School Nurses were invited to a RIDOH/RI Chapter AAP sponsored webinar on August 5th where up to date guidance was shared. This webinar was recorded and available through RIDOH. RIDOH is hosting a zoom call with school nurses and school physicians around the case investigation and contact tracing protocols and practices. School nurses interested in school-based testing this fall will have access to training by RIDOH.



All School Staff: The newly added LEA Assistance Teams (operating out of the Education Operation Center) is exploring additional professional development opportunities for LEAs specific to reopening. In addition, a vast [menu of free professional development opportunities](#) have been put together to support all educators as they plan for a safe and successful reopening.

***When will the playbook for schools be available and what type of information will it include?***

The [Outbreak Response Protocols: Prek-12](#) was released on 8/7/2020. This playbook includes information on: the criteria that makes an individual a probable case, determining close contact in schools, and protocols to respond to a symptomatic person in schools.

***For students with nut allergies potentially eating in classrooms, is there any specific guidance on how to meet the letter of the law?***

Follow best practice and look at each case individually. If space allows, a child can be seated off to the side in the classroom (like in the cafeteria) or at a designated area within the cafeteria (as schools have done previously). Otherwise, if it is a severe allergy, the child may need to eat in a separate location.

***Is there guidance for situations when it is necessary to exercise physical restraint?***

Any educator engaging in physical restraint should quickly secure proper protective equipment before engaging the student. At a minimum, this includes gloves and a face covering. It is recommended that educators wear a surgical mask, face shield, gown or smock that can be laundered.

***What guidance does RIDOH have for schools to use to determine which students are too medically vulnerable to return to school?***

The decision regarding whether or not a child is too medically vulnerable to return to school should be determined by the child's physician in consultation with the family.

***The guidance notes that 6 feet of physical distance should be maintained as much as possible. Is there a minimum number of feet of physical distance that must be maintained?***

At this time, there is not a minimum number of feet of physical distance that must be maintained. The 6 foot guidance is to reduce spread between individuals. When planning, if students/adults are unable to maintain a 6 foot distance apart then additional mitigation efforts should be used (i.e. face covering, cleaning spaces/supplies, not facing one another) and the spacing should be as close to 6 feet as possible.

From the recent [AAP guidance](#):

*"...the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools "space seating/desks at least 6 feet apart when feasible." In many school settings, 6 feet between students is not feasible without limiting the number of students. Evidence suggests that spacing as close as 3 feet may approach the benefits of 6 feet of space, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic. Schools should weigh the benefits of strict*



*adherence to a 6-feet spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative.... Given what is known about transmission dynamics, adults and adult staff within schools should attempt to maintain a distance of 6 feet from other persons as much as possible, particularly around other adult staff”.*

***What special guidance or consideration exists for students falling under the McKinney-Vento Act?***

At this time, there is no additional guidance. All LEAs should account for all students as part of their plan development.

***Isolation Rooms: What guidance can you provide on what would make a reasonable isolation room? Are there any set criteria for the room? Can there be more than one student at a time in the room?***

Preferably the isolation room should have a door and proper ventilation. When possible, the room should have a separate bathroom. We recommend having one person to a room whenever possible. Schools should consult with their school physician regarding additional guidance and when creating or deciding upon an isolation room.

***Who will make the decisions about quarantining and closing schools throughout the year?***

As stated in the LEA Reopening Plan Template, each LEA is required to submit the name(s) of at least one representative to work with RIDOH on testing staff and students, contact tracing, case investigation, isolation and quarantine, and any other follow-up related to outbreak containment. The decisions to quarantine staff and student, as well as when schools will need to close or reopen after being closed, will be made through a partnership between the schools, RIDOH, and possibly RIDE.

**Classroom Materials:**

***\*\*\*Are there any recommendations regarding the use of area rugs in classrooms?***

Rugs do not need to be removed. When children are seated on area rugs they should maintain a 6 ft distance and maintenance of rugs should follow [the CDC guidelines](#) and must be included in the daily cleaning and disinfecting procedures.

***Are there any recommendations for teachers working with students at kidney shaped tables?***

Guidance recommends that students be forward facing, at least 6 ft apart, wearing a mask at all times. Plexiglass may be used if spaced out appropriately however, masks should still be maintained. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) understands and supports the exceptions to wearing masks for health considerations, as outlined in the [CDC guidance \[cdc.gov\]](#).

**Face Coverings:**

***\*\*\*The guidance from RIDE and DHS regarding facemasks for children is different. Which set of rules should we follow for our Preschool/PreK population?***

At this time, RI Pre-K’s are following DHS guidance that facemasks are not mandatory while a child is in their stable pod. It is our recommendation though to encourage facemasks whenever



possible when 6 feet of distance cannot be maintained and to help children get used to wearing facemasks. Facemasks are still required in all programs anytime a child is in a common area, such as during drop-off and pick-up times, transitioning outside of their classroom and in any shared bathroom scenario. Facemasks should not be worn during rest time.

***What happens when a student refuses to wear a face covering? What recommendations are there for how to respond in this likely situation?***

The situation of the past several months has caused much stress, anxiety and trauma for our students. While we recognize that students will always naturally test the rules, we urge all schools to employ measures that would provide information and education about the importance of mitigation protocols for their own protection and the protection of others over punishment that might further remove students from the learning environment or actions that would result in more learning regression or increased social emotional stress. Students who do not comply with wearing a face covering in situations where one is necessary should be provided a face covering if they do not have one. When LEAs establish local policy related to face coverings, they should consider provisions to provide students with a face covering when needed, as well as protocols for addressing situations when students refuse to wear a face covering - being sure to address situations in a way that recognizes individual medical circumstances, does not ostracize or punish a student, add to trauma or remove students from access to learning.

***Should students wear masks during recess? PE?***

Yes. If a mask cannot be tolerated during vigorous exercise, additional physical distance is recommended (greater than 14 feet).

***\*\*\*If students are in their stable group & are in an outdoor classroom space that allows for 6+ feet between students, should they wear a mask still?***

Masks are required in the K-12 setting, even when students are in stable groups and socially distanced (greater than 6 feet apart). The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) understands and supports the exceptions to wearing masks for health considerations, as outlined in the [CDC guidance \[cdc.gov\]](https://www.cdc.gov). The only exceptions are when students are eating and when they are participating in mask breaks (see below). For example, if students are greater than six feet apart in their outdoor classroom (such as seated on mats, listening to a story outside), this could be a time for a mask break as well.

***\*\*\*Is there any guidance on giving students mask breaks throughout the school day?***

The best practice for mask breaks would be outside with students greater than six feet apart.

**Screenings and Physical Requirements:**

***Will the school physical exam form still be required for the SY20-21 entry?***

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare providers are working hard to get children caught up on annual physical exams. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is not changing policy on physical exam for school entry requirements; however, they are providing



some leeway to allow for more time to meet this requirement. As a reminder, students cannot be excluded from school for not submitting the physical exam form.

***Will there be any changes to the immunization requirements in schools?***

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare providers are working hard to get children and adolescents caught up on vaccinations over the summer. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is not changing policy on immunization school entry requirements; however, they are providing some leeway this fall. If a child has started a vaccine series yet and does not have all doses required for school entry, the school nurse can utilize the RIDOH temporary exemption form. In the rare instance where a child is missing all doses of a vaccine, a temporary exemption can be utilized, but the parent must set up an appointment as soon as possible and document the appointment date on the form. The school nurse must follow-up with the parent soon after the appointment date to receive the record indicating the child was vaccinated. As a reminder, the annual school immunization survey will be submitted to RIDOH by the school nurse in early December 2020.

**Dental Screenings:**

***Will school dental screenings take place this year?***

Screenings by school dentists are considered an essential service and are required by [statute](#) however should proceed in a way that complies with your district reopening plan. Contact your school dentist to review what is needed in terms of scheduling, including possibly screening on more than one date so they can plan well in advance. Schools may develop strategies to include distancing of students. Screening may be performed outdoors, weather permitting. Ask dental staff about COVID-19 symptoms upon arrival to conform to policies. More information about dental screening is available [here](#).

***Our school was scheduled to participate in the Basic Screening Survey (BSS) for K and 3 last year but did not have our session. Will there be a way to participate if we missed out?***

The Basic Screening Survey is critical to our success in assessing the oral health of Rhode Island children and identifying any disparities. We were able to reach two-thirds of schools before the closure and hope to reach those schools not included to have the data we need. Contact Jordyn Learman, oral health epidemiologist, once screening dates are established or with any questions.

***We have a school-based sealant program. Will this still take place?***

Dental sealants are the most effective way to prevent tooth decay in children's permanent molars. Sealant programs are using non-aerosol techniques and materials. Dental hygienists will, as always, follow [CDC recommendations for infection control](#). Please reach out to your [SEAL RI! agency](#) to discuss best locations to provide sealant placement and scheduling of students which will allow social distancing and effective infection control.



***Is the Molar Express in operation?***

Yes. The [Molar Express](#) is affiliated with the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile program and after deployment for COVID-19 related duties is now ready to serve RI children at schools. [Designated agencies](#) will contact schools to schedule.

***What is different in dental care?***

After several months of limiting to emergency care only, dental offices and health center dental clinics have resumed routine dental care. In addition to screening staff and patients, practicing social distancing, and wearing more personal protective equipment (PPE), dental healthcare providers are taking steps to reduce aerosols and improve ventilation. Many offices have been using teledentistry for patient evaluation prior to visits as well. Click [here](#) to download a Dental Safety Net List in find dental care or [English](#) or [Spanish](#) to provide to families.

***What measures can we take to assure good dental health for our students during this time of change?***

In addition to sealants, community water fluoridation is a critical public health measure to keep teeth healthy. Think of ways to encourage students to drink teeth-strengthening tap water from reusable water bottles to help fight cavities! RIDOH's Oral Health Program is here to help you in your work to promote healthy teeth for children. Contact us with any questions at [RIDOH.OralHealth@health.ri.gov](mailto:RIDOH.OralHealth@health.ri.gov) or visit our website devoted to oral health information for school nurses and teachers at <https://health.ri.gov/oralhealth/for/schools/>.

**Additional Screenings:**

***Will hearing screening be conducted during the 2020-2021 school year?***

Yes, the audiology center will be sending out a letter to school district school nurses and dates will be scheduled as appropriate.

***Are vision and scoliosis screenings still required per the regulations in the 2020-2021 school year?***

Yes, plan to conduct these screenings if feasible and appropriate at any point during the school year.

***Screening students: I know the expectation is that parents screen students every morning, however, do they have to complete an attestation every day? Would it be possible to have parents sign off a few times a year to attest that they are screening every morning? Are the districts expected to collect this information? If so, what are they expected to do if a parent doesn't complete it?***

LEAs should work with the school community to establish a system for collecting this information daily, supporting parents to submit the information needed since it provides an important check each day. It provides an important check each day. Students do not need to be isolated or sent home if the information is not collected, but LEAs should follow up with families to help them understand the importance of providing the information. In addition, the Crush COVID App has the ability to send daily reminders to parents and staff.



***Are districts required to provide mental health screening on their employees and, if so, is there a recommended screening tool or organization? The template specifically references an evaluation.***

Districts and schools do not need to conduct a formal mental health screening/evaluation that is documented. However, districts need to have some type of system in place to check-in on how their staff are managing (now and as they anticipate and plan for reopening) as we know how heightened the stress level was as we closed the year with distance learning and likely is as we plan for a very different reopening. The recommendation in the template is to find a way to take stock of how staff is feeling and having a system for staff to report their fears/anxieties and seek help as needed.

The recent [American Academy of Pediatrics guidance states](#): **Mental Health of Staff**

*“The personal impact on educators and other school staff should be recognized. In the same way that students are going to need support to effectively return to school and to be prepared to be ready to process the information they are being taught, teachers cannot be expected to be successful at teaching children without having their mental health needs supported. The strain on teachers this year as they have been asked to teach differently while they support their own needs and those of their families has been significant, and they will be bringing that stress back to school as schools reopen. Resources such as Employee Assistance Programs and other means to provide support and mental health services should be established prior to reopening. The individual needs and concerns of school professionals should be addressed with accommodations made as needed (eg, for a classroom educator who is pregnant, has a medical condition that confers a higher risk of serious illness with COVID-19, resides with a family member who is at higher risk, or has a mental health condition that compromises the ability to cope with the additional stress). Although schools should be prepared to be agile to meet evolving needs and respond to increasing knowledge related to the pandemic and may need to institute partial or complete closures when the public health need requires, they should recognize that staff, students, and families will benefit from sufficient time to understand and adjust to changes in routine and practices. During a crisis, people benefit from clear and regular communication from a trusted source of information and the opportunity to dialogue about concerns and needs and feel they are able to contribute in some way to the decision-making process. Change is more difficult in the context of crisis and when predictability is already severely compromised.”*

***Will school staff and/or students be required to be tested prior to the start of school?***

CDC is not recommending preadmission testing at this time. Should a district choose to pursue it, the district should be mindful that multiple districts making this request or statewide preadmission testing would likely overwhelm the testing system, increase testing turnaround times (results not timely), and may create a logistical and financial hardship on families.

**Planning for differently abled students (additional guidance is located in the instruction section)**



### ***How will differently abled students receive their individualized programming as written in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?***

First and foremost, students should receive all services identified in an IEP. In general, schools should try to limit the number of classes each adult interacts with students in-person in an attempt to lower the risk of potentially spreading the virus. With that said, we know that certain staff, such as special education teachers, must provide service to multiple stable groups of students. If staff must move between multiple stable groups or groups of students, then they should follow increased mitigation efforts such as washing their hands between classes, wearing a face covering, and remaining 6 feet from their students as feasible. Many of the decisions about what is best for safety, education, and SEL needs for a student, and others who interact with that student, will need to be made on a case-by-case basis. The [AAP guidance](#) that was recently released states:

*“Every child and adolescent with a disability is entitled to a free and appropriate education and is entitled to special education services based on their individualized education program (IEP). Students receiving special education services may be more negatively affected by distance-learning and may be disproportionately impacted by interruptions in regular education. It may not be feasible, depending on the needs of the individual child and adolescent, to adhere both to distancing guidelines and the criteria outlined in a specific IEP. Attempts to meet physical distancing guidelines should meet the needs of the individual child and may require creative solutions, often on a case-by-case basis.”*

### ***Is there guidance around inclusionary practices where students from multiple grades move from small group to whole class throughout the day? Will there be IDEA flexibilities to keep stable groups?***

At this time, there are no flexibilities provided for federal IDEA law. At this time, the recommendation is to limit the interactions of mixed group students according to the information outlined for elementary and high schools.

### ***How can parents of differently abled students ask and receive answers about special education services and programming?***

As a first step, parents/guardians should reach out to the district special education director to discuss services and supports for students. If parents/guardians have a questions or concerns about the supports and information they receive, RIDE has a dedicated email to support parents/guardians: [ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov).



## Instruction

**Please refer to the multiple instructional documents released on the [RIDE COVID-19 website](#) (under the table section marked “Planning for 2020-21 School Year”) for more detailed guidance.**

**\*\*\*Are districts able to do a staggered or phased start to school?**

Yes. This was stated at the Governor’s Press Conference on 8/31/2020. Schools may wish to employ a staggered start to reopening to try out the reopening process and protocols while fewer students and staff are present. All students would begin school on the same day (8/14/2020), but some would begin in-person and some would begin with distance learning. For instance, grades PreK-2 come back in-person week one while the remaining grades begin with distance learning. Additional grades or populations of students will continue to return back in-person by October 13 at the latest. All LEAs will reopen in their planned “Full Reopening” scenario, except Central Falls and Providence who will reopen in their planned “Partial Reopening” scenario, with all students who want to return in-person back in their classrooms by **October 13** at the latest.

**\*\*\*Will there be additional guidance put out about revised expectations for Distance Learning and best practices learned from Distance Learning?**

RIDE will continue to share resources to improve Distance Learning. Please refer to the [Back to School RI: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Reopening Guidance](#) for best practices and setting norms for distance learning.

**\*\*\*Do RI Pre-Ks have to offer families the option of distance learning in lieu of in person instruction?**

RI Pre-K has always been a choice for families. Families can choose to apply to the lottery and, if selected, choose to accept or decline the seat. RI Pre-K is not a mandatory grade. RI Pre-Ks in community based organizations and Head Start programs are not required to offer families choice. LEAs will offer choice to RI Pre-K students as they have done with other students in their schools.

**\*\*\*What students are meant by the term vulnerable populations?**

Vulnerable populations would include any group or population of students whose learning is more at risk due to current circumstances. For most schools, this would include students receiving special education services, multilingual learners, homeless students, students in foster care and students similarly at risk. Schools should consider how the students progressed through distance learning and which students are in greatest need for in person instruction.

**\*\*\*RIDE guidance has asked districts to prioritize vulnerable populations. Can you provide more information about how districts should prioritize?**

RIDE suggests reviewing the needs of students and how distance learning worked for students in the spring. While already prioritizing elementary and transition grades, districts should



consider returning students whose IEPs include school settings and services that are better provided in-person. This may mean students with more complex needs requiring in person instruction and related services return to school in-person before other grades have fully returned. Students who typically attend school predominately in general education settings may not need to return if progressing through distance learning. If there are related services (Speech, PT, OT, etc.) typically provided, it may be possible for students to have appointments at school for those services while instruction is conducted through distance learning. These decisions are individually determined and parents should be involved with making the determination of the provision of in person services.

***\*\*\*Which students are eligible to participate in the state's distance learning school option through the Master Price Agreement?***

The state will select a vendor that is able to provide a distance learning option for students who are unable to attend school due to medical reasons (see FAQ below). There will be a limited number of seats that will be allotted to each district. There will be a Master Price Agreement for supplemental distance learning providers that will be available to all LEAs as well.

***How should districts respond if a parent wishes to opt their child out of in-person learning?***

If the RI Department of Health, Governor, and RIDE decide that our health data supports a 100% full in-person return to school scenario, we hope that families will feel comfortable and confident allowing children to return to school in-person. While we would be inviting students to return in-person, we know parents may not yet be comfortable with this option. As a result, all LEAs will have to determine a plan for high quality distance learning for students who are unable to return in-person, those that must remain home for short periods of time due to illness or quarantine, and those whose parents choose to keep them home for distance learning. Some possible examples from LEA Reopening Plans are: live instruction where teachers are recorded while they are teaching for students to watch in real time and/or later in the day, designated virtual or distance learning teachers, and through a purchased distance learning vendor.

Additionally, RIDE is committed to supporting schools and districts with finding flexible solutions for student learning during this time. To that end, RIDE is actively working with the Department of Administration and Ocean State Procures to identify partners that are positioned to support LEAs with a variety of options. There is currently an [RFP out soliciting vendors](#) for learning platforms, including a standards-aligned distance learning option; however, this an ongoing process. At this time, there is no additional information, but the agency will share any identified solutions available as soon as possible, potentially through a state-led Master Pricing Agreement (MPA).

***What safety measures would have to be in place for a school to provide home tutoring for students with IEPs who are unable to attend school in-person for medical reasons and for whom distance learning was not successful?***

The safety measures include: the student and staff follow the symptom screening protocol, the staff (and student if feasible) wear a face covering while in the home, and a 6 ft. physical



distancing is maintained while in the home. The [RIDOH guidance](#) for home visiting may also be a helpful resource.

***Since the school start date has been pushed back, will the age requirements for kindergarten entrance also be pushed back?***

Title 16 states that students must turn five by September 1<sup>st</sup> to enroll in kindergarten. As this is written into state law, the age requirement will not be adjusted.

***Will all students not able to return need accommodations under federal 504 rules?***

If a student has a disability as defined by Section 504 (a mental or physical impairment which substantially limits a major life activity), the student qualifies for a Section 504 plan with a reasonable accommodation to limit exposure to COVID-19. The accommodation may be distance learning.

If a student has an underlying medical condition (but not a disability as defined in Section 504) which puts the student at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, and the condition is medically documented, the student has a medical need to do distance learning, but not under a 504 plan.

Nonetheless, all LEAs are encouraged to provide parents with a choice for their child's return to school (see below). All LEAs will have to determine a plan for high quality distance learning for students who are unable to return in-person, those who must remain home for short periods of time due to illness or quarantine, and those whose parents choose to keep them home for distance learning.

***If districts are unable to bring back every student in-person every day, based upon the health and safety guidelines and restraints (i.e. staffing, busing, space), can they opt to send students back using a hybrid model of in-person and distance?***

If a district cannot bring all students back in-person every day, they can select to bring their middle and high school students back in a rotating, hybrid schedule so that all of their students return back in-person, just not every day. On the days that students are not in-person, they will be participating in distance learning. Students in elementary school must be prioritized to be back in-person every day in the full in-person and partial in-person scenarios.

***\*\*\*What is the guidance around PE class?***

Additional guidance coming soon.

The CDC guidance says:

- Vigorous exercise in a confined space (e.g., indoors) may [contribute to transmission of COVID-19](#) and should be limited.
- Social distancing helps protect students at recess or in physical education class.
- Consider conducting activities in an area with greater ventilation or air exchange (e.g., outdoors).



- See CDC’s guidance on [youth sports](#) for more information.
- [Adaptations and alternatives](#) should be considered whenever possible to increase the feasibility of wearing a cloth face covering or to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

In addition, any shared materials should be cleaned between individual student uses. Students should wash their hands before and after PE class.

***Is the music and art educator guidance LEAs have received issued by RIDE?***

The music guidance was written by Rhode Island Music Education Association (RIMEA) and Rhode Island American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). The visual arts education guidance was written by the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts-Arts Learning Network and the Rhode Island Art Education Association. They are not RIDE or RIDOH guidance documents, but rather were written by these organizations to serve as considerations for LEAs to use as they plan for reopening. Schools should utilize these tools with caution and continue to consult the Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance when planning for all instructional content areas.

***For LEA planning under full distance learning to partial in-person, should schools be planning for the number of instructional minutes outlined in the spring’s Distance Learning Guidance for the amount of distance learning time students are receiving?***

The Instructional minutes required have not changed from the BEP. Prior distance learning guidance articulates recommended screen time and also describes how asynchronous learner activities could be considered part of the instruction time.

***For accountability purposes, are there new attendance policies for students? How should we handle truancy?***

Decisions about next year’s accountability will be made at a later date and will be communicated accordingly.

***Will we have state assessments in SY 20-21?***

At this time, we are planning to hold state assessments as expected. To date, no federal waivers have been released for the 2020-21 school year.

***Is there any special guidance around implementing Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs?***

More information coming soon.

***Are there new deadlines for educators to complete their Professional Learning Unit (PLU) requirements for SY 20-21?***

We expect all educators who have certificates expiring in 2021 will be able to complete all required PLUs prior to the expiration date.

***Will there be guidance on how we should be using the statewide Professional Learning (PL) Days? Will RIDE be planning offerings for educators?***



RIDE will be providing and sharing statewide options for PL days. LEAs should work with educators to determine needs and offerings for these days. Any RIDE offerings will be in addition to LEA offerings. We are encouraging collaboration across LEAs.

***Will the Basic Education Plan (BEP) be enforced for SY 20-21? If so, what adjustments need to be made? (i.e., do we still need 100 minutes of PE?) What about the length of the school day? Other flexibilities around instructional minutes?***

At this time, the expectations of the BEP must be followed. RIDE will continue to review policies and regulations to determine if any flexibility is needed.

***Regarding the new statewide calendar, how are teachers expected to participate in professional learning while also conducting Distance Learning?***

Learning on the PD days should be planned in advance and may be asynchronous.

***With districts losing coaching positions and other supports due to uncertain funding, how will RIDE plan on partnering with districts to support teachers especially with equity, lesson design, and engagement?***

RIDE has reached out to all LEAs to identify coaching needs for SY 20-21. RIDE will also seek professional learning opportunities to offer to educators.

***How do these models for reopening ensure equity for our special populations? Our differently abled students and multilingual learners really struggled during distance learning, and I am really worried about the increased possibility of academic/language back-slide.***

All of the reopening models prioritize in-person instruction for our vulnerable populations, such as differently abled students and multilingual learners. In addition, RIDE will share additional guidance specific to supporting these two populations when schools reopen.

#### **Statewide School Calendar:**

***Can LEAs change the dates of the professional learning days noted on the statewide school calendar?***

The professional learning days established in the unified statewide calendar apply to all LEAs in RI so we can focus on shared professional learning opportunities at the state level. LEAs may not change those dates, but may add additional professional learning dates to their calendar.

***Can we add days to the statewide calendar? Related, do all LEAs have to follow the holidays just as they must follow the PD days?***

You may extend your school year by adding instructional day(s) for students or professional learning day(s) for educators. However, you may not shorten the school year. Districts can decide which of the holidays they observe.



# Reopening Operations

*Facilities; Operations (Budget, Food, Enrollment, Staffing);  
Transportation; Technology*

## **Budgeting:**

### ***\*\*\*How is the state assisting districts with securing PPE supplies?***

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) has worked in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to provide a one month supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to every LEA across the state. All LEAs were provided with a number of PPE items including thermometers (1 per every 50 students in a district), reusable cloth face covering for students and staff, and supplies specifically for school nurses and staff with high-intensity contact with students include surgical masks, KN95 masks, eye protections (i.e. goggles or face shields) and body covering (i.e. lab coats).

To help LEAs procure additional PPE, RIDE has collaborated with our Rhode Island government partners and across state lines to secure access to a master price agreement (MPA) with the State of Minnesota (additional information may be found by searching MPA-424 here.) If LEAs are interested in leveraging this opportunity to become a "child" client under RIDE's "parent" participation, please be prepared to share the pertinent information with the Office of Finance next week, when RIDE will be reaching out to business managers and superintendents directly to solicit their participation. RIDE has worked to streamline and expedite the procurement process with the offering of this MPA to ensure LEAs have access to PPE; LEAs will have the autonomy to order as needed, pay for, and manage the direct delivery of all PPE supplies.

### ***When will we be receiving guidance on the Dept. Of Health submission of school budgets related to COVID-19 expenses? What are the expectations for Districts to provide reentry budgets?***

The Department of Health will not be providing guidance on school budgets. Districts will be expected to complete a budget template for part of their Reopening Plans (which will be disseminated to districts as soon as it is available). If the budget template is not available prior to the 7/17 submission date, LEAs need to provide an assurance that they will: Develop a high-level picture of the district budget for this upcoming school year. Consider: change in revenues, change in expenditures, Spring budget holdovers – costs or revenues-, COVID specific funding (i.e. CARES, ESSER Funds, emergency funding) as stated in the Reopening Template.

### ***How can we use CARES, ESSER, or other federal stimulus funding related to the COVID-19 pandemic to support our budgeting and reopening planning? For instance, are we allowed to use these dollars to purchase furniture—for example, if we want to move from students sitting at tables, to students sitting in individual desks?***



Please refer to the guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers in Appendix A of the [soft-launch of the ESSER Subgrant Application](#) that was released via the Commissioner’s Field Memo. This document is also available on [RIDE’s COVID-19 webpage](#) within the accordion labeled Planning for 2020-21 School Year. In both cases, it details the broadly permissible expenditures for ESSER funding, whereas CARES Act funding have different spending parameters.

To the specific question of spending on furniture or desks— this spending, in general, would not pass the test of “reasonable, necessary, and allocable”. If tables are already available, then students have an adequate workspace; districts should leverage personal protective equipment, stability in groupings, and social distancing guidelines to ensure compliance with public health regulations. However, purchasing desks or additional furniture is not the most efficacious solution in this scenario, nor is it the best use of limited, finite resources. Furthermore, these pandemic stimulus dollars are neither intended to supplant local investments, nor to provide support for facilities improvements or capital investments unless directly related to a necessity borne out of COVID-19 since the period beginning on March 13, 2020.

***Will funding to schools be accelerated given the need to create LEA reopening plans? What, if any, CARES ACT flexibilities exist? Do we know when the access to federal funding will be available?***

RIDE anticipates releasing the supplemental funding within the next several weeks. The deadline for budget submission will be open for an extended period to allow districts to engage in additional planning and determine budget needs.

***Transportation: Please refer to the updated [Transportation Guidance](#) released 8/14/2020 for additional transportation guidance.***

***\*\*\*Will students be able to ride the bus if they are unable to or have difficulty with wearing a mask.***

All LEA’s should work with parents to identify students that cannot tolerate wearing a mask, use hand sanitizer or be transported with the windows open. The LEA’s should inform the transportation company so they can ensure that accommodations are made for these students.

***For transportation, is a seating chart required or suggested for ridership?***

There is no requirement that LEAs submit a seating chart for transportation. However, LEAs are encouraged to create them for their district for assigned seating and contact tracing purposes.

***What, exactly, does it mean that “students are screened when getting on the bus?”***

Most commonly, this will mean that students are asked questions about how they feel as part of a verbal screening. More information coming soon.

***Facilities: Please refer to the [Back to School RI: COVID-19 Facilities and Physical Plant Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island’s Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) released 8/24/2020.***



**\*\*\*Can schools use extension cords for box fans in windows or for HEPA filter units placed in classrooms? What are the constraints for extension cord use?**

Yes, when such use complies with all of the following State Fire Code below:

1:11.1.5 Extension Cords.

11.1.5.1 Extension cords shall be plugged directly into an approved receptacle, power tap, or multi-plug adapter and shall, except for approved multi-plug extension cords, serve only one portable appliance.

11.1.5.2\* The ampacity of the extension cords shall not be less than the rated capacity of the portable appliance supplied by the cord.

11.1.5.3 The extension cords shall be maintained in good condition without splices, deterioration, or damage.

11.1.5.4 Extension cords shall be grounded when servicing grounded portable appliances.

11.1.5.5 Extension cords and flexible cords shall not be affixed to structures; extend through walls, ceilings, or floors, or under doors or floor coverings; or be subject to environmental or physical damage.

11.1.5.6 Extension cords shall not be used as a substitute for permanent wiring.

**\*\*\*If schools are planning to install box fans in widows in a semi-permanent fashion, is there a concern for egress routes from the classroom?**

Means of egress in all portions of the building must always be kept clear and unobstructed. This includes trip hazards such as extension cords and box fans in doorways. Also, at least one outside classroom window must remain accessible and operable. (The outside classroom window access is not required when the building is equipped with a sprinkler system or there is an approved second classroom door.)

**\*\*\*Are there any considerations for where a hand sanitizer dispenser placement? Would any hand sanitizer that spilled on the rug be a fire hazard?**

The alcohol-based product in hand sanitizers is a Class I flammable liquid. Hand sanitizer dispensers should not be installed in corridors or exits, over electrical receptacles, or over carpeted floors. (Dispensers may be installed over carpet in sprinklered rooms). Dispensers shall be at least 48" apart.

When storage quantities exceed 5 gallons of hand sanitizer per fire compartment additional fire protection requirements, such as flammable liquid storage cabinets, may be required. Consult with your fire marshal regarding specific requirements for your facility.

**Are we allowed to use fans and AC units in the classrooms?**

Keeping rooms at comfortable temperatures will allow students/staff to consistently wear their cloth face coverings.

Airflow is important. Schools should introduce as much outside air as possible with air conditioners and should use the highest rated filters compatible with the units/systems. If possible, avoid fans, etc. blowing directly on students.



***If we are using plexiglass to separate student spaces when 6 foot spacing isn't possible, does the plexiglass need to have a certain fire rating?***

Acrylic or Plexiglass partitions must have at least a Class C flame spread rating when installed in educational occupancies. Corridors, lobbies and large assembly areas, however, would need an A or a B flame spread rating. (Class C would be allowable when the building is equipped with an approved sprinkler system). Any curtains or other loosely hanging material need to be tested and deemed in compliance with the NFPA 701 flame propagation test. Barriers should not obstruct manual fire alarm boxes, sprinkler heads, smoke or heat detectors.

***What is the specific guidance around 'open' classrooms?***

There is not a specific guidance document for open classroom spaces. The use of partitions or other types of barriers can be utilized but do not replace other mitigation efforts such as physical distance and face coverings.

***What is the guidance around using off-campus spaces to hold classes? Will there need to be emergency usage requirements (i.e., libraries, community centers, mixed-use spaces)? Is this even an option?***

Yes. LEAs may look for additional space as they plan for reopening.

***What will be the guidance on conducting fire drills during the school year – will there be any flexibilities provided?***

Fire drills and evacuations are feasible as long as the staff/students stay in their stable groups and maintain 14 feet distance from each group while outside of the building. More information coming soon related to non-stable group scenarios.

***Is there any updated guidance on the usage of exits/entrances?***

Exits need to be kept accessible and not blocked or locked against egress. A clear width of at least 6 feet must be maintained in all corridors.

Stairway and other fire doors shall not be propped open. Classroom doors may be propped open when the faculty and staff have been trained to close all doors in an emergency. It is the duty of the principals to ensure that exits facilities are checked daily and are in proper condition.

Food:

***\*\*\*Will there be central food pick up locations that can be accessed by students who are participating in distance learning, but their school is not located in close proximity to their residence (ex. a student lives in Warwick but goes to a CTE program in Chariho)?***

At this time, no; however, RIDE is working with partners to try to find solutions to this challenge. More information to come.

Technology:

***Will there continue to be free Internet for families in need?***



RIDE is currently working with vendors to identify any possible opportunities for the opening of school.

**Staffing:**

**\*\*\*Are there any new regulations for who can serve as a substitute teacher?**

Yes. Day-to-day substitute teachers (as defined by an individual who is employed on a temporary basis, for fewer than forty-five (45) days in the same assignment) has to meet the updated requirements:

- Must hold a bachelor's degree of higher OR
- An Associate's degree OR
- Complete a minimum of two years college completion on a four-year degree track

An overview of the 2018 regulation changes are outlined in this [guidance document](#).

**\*\*\*Is RIDE looking to loosen up flexibilities around teacher certification to support teacher shortages?**

RI General Law requires all teachers to hold teaching certificates. At this time, RIDE does not anticipate changes to the statute.

However, LEAs should refer to the updated certification regulations and flexibilities. [This document](#) covers all the important details about the certification regulation promulgated in December 2018.

***Is there any guidance about staffing? Can staff be laid off if they are no longer needed in present reopening models? What happens if school plans and needs are in conflict with the collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)? Is there going to be some type of executive order or regulation around this?***

RIDE will support schools in conducting reviews of staff and student staffing policies to understand who is returning. This should include a breakdown of the staff, including administrators, licensed teachers, support staff with a teaching license, support staff without a teaching license, full-time nurses, part-time nurses, and school counselors.

***Are substitutes able to rotate through classrooms or do they need to be limited to one classroom for the day? Related, can teachers cover other classes during their unassigned period?***

As much as possible, the movement of teachers around the building should be limited. A schedule for substitutes that provides as little movement as possible should be established. The fewer groups of students that staff interact with in-person, the better. Reducing the number of in-person interactions reduces risk. If staff must move between multiple stable groups or groups of students, then they should follow increased mitigation efforts such as washing their hands between classes, wearing a face covering, and remaining 6 feet from their students as feasible.



***What is the guidance for staff that work with the whole school (i.e., reading teacher, math coach)? How can they support students if we need to be in stable groups? Is there a number of stable groups an adult can interact with?***

There is no set number of stable groups with which an adult can interact. Reducing the number of in-person interactions reduces risk. If staff must move between multiple stable groups or groups of students, then they should follow increased mitigation efforts such as washing their hands between classes, wearing a face covering, and remaining 6 feet from their students as feasible. The lower the number of groups an individual interacts with, the lower the risk and easier contact tracing and quarantining can be if necessary.

## Miscellaneous

***How will RIDE communicate the distinction between LEA/school actions that are mandates versus ones that are recommendations?***

[The LEA Reopening Planning Template](#) outlines what LEAs must do through the submission of evidence in some areas and by providing assurances in others.

***How will educator evaluation requirements be implemented for SY 20-21? Will there be any modifications or flexibilities around caseloads?***

At this time, additional flexibilities beyond those provided at the end of SY 19-20 are not expected.

***Will my LEA/school be allowed to have teacher candidates for student teaching?***

Yes. We encourage LEAs to work with educator preparation programs as they normally would and to include them as partners in reopening school. LEAs should consider the benefits a student teacher and practicum student could bring to the classroom and how they could make this addition safely.

***Are there privacy concerns if classroom instruction is broadcasted?***

LEAs will need to continue to follow all privacy policies established during Distance Learning. For reference, see the student privacy guidance documents on RIDE's COVID-19 website.

***Will the LEA reopening plans need to be approved by RIDE or will RIDE just provide feedback?***

RIDE is partnering with District Management Group (DM Group), a public-school consulting organization, to provide support for the development of and feedback on LEA plans. All plans were reviewed by RIDE and RIDOH.

***How is RIDE soliciting input and feedback from multiple stakeholder groups as they assist LEAs in reopening and plan for the state's continued reopening?***

LEAs should include a wide variety of stakeholders in their Reopening Committees and determine venues to solicit input and feedback from their stakeholders. Each LEA has a regional point of contact from RIDE who serves as a conduit between the field and RIDE for support,



answering questions, soliciting input, and capturing feedback. Additionally, the RIDE communication and engagement team supports regular interactions with the public (i.e. families, educators, students). RIDE will continue to provide information to the field via our weekly Field Memo, social media channels and website. Finally, feedback, input, and questions can be sent to the Reopening Team at: [reentry@ride.ri.gov](mailto:reentry@ride.ri.gov).

