



K12 Return to School Recommended Guidelines

The Re-Open Florida Industry Working Group Focus Industries included: Administrative, Education, Information and Technology, Manufacturing, Utilities and Wholesale. Utilizing the discussions and guidelines of this working group as a base, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) recommends the following measures for K-12 education. While districts continue to design plans for returning to school buildings, state guidelines are imperative to know the conditions that will guide decision making and preparation in order to build the confidence of the community through transparency for the many facets that are necessary for a safe return. This proposal outlines both statewide and local school district components that must be symbiotic in development to ensure coherency of understanding and implementation across the state of Florida.

Establish Statewide Conditions for Return to School

Define clear statewide guidance for the re-opening of schools which align to the regulations developed in collaboration with health/medical professionals to ensure the safety and well-being of students, families and educational professionals. The areas outlined below represent major considerations that need to be addressed and clearly articulated to ensure all local school systems are planning for, implementing and monitoring practices that are in the best interest of the entire state of Florida.

Statewide K12 Pandemic Education Response Team

Creation of a cross-functional state team that includes health/medical professionals to establish the medical trend guidelines for re-opening schools at a statewide level, aligned with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Once conditions for return are established by the Pandemic Education Response Team, statewide components for *Return to School* plans will be developed. Local school systems will utilize these components to develop their district *Return to School* plan, in collaboration with local medical/health professionals. All *Return to School* plans (state and local) must be communicated and posted so all stakeholders have access.

Social Distancing and Large Group Gatherings

While the Florida class size amendment mitigates large class sizes in most cases, considerations for issuing guidance regarding social distancing and group gatherings in the K12 educational setting must be reviewed and issued. Components of the K12 experience that must be measured by state leadership and health/medical professionals include:

- **Student to teacher ratios:** number of students and adults in one area at a given time
- **Physical classroom space:** space allowable per student/adult
- **Large group settings:** recess, lunch, physical education and common areas

- **Transportation requirements:** number of students on a bus and distance between students
- **Specialized student populations:** students who by the nature of their disability or health conditions cannot be distanced from an adult support or may not understand the need to distance from peers
- **High-risk staff:** older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions
- **Traditional model of instructional delivery:** if guidelines cannot be met within the constraints of the traditional (face-to-face) instructional delivery model, blended or phased service delivery will need to be planned, developed and implemented.

When issuing guidance for social distancing and group gatherings in the K12 environment, considerations must also include financial support for increasing the personnel, programmatic and operational capacity to adhere to the regulations. Strict social distancing and group gathering protocols may be near impossible to implement due to the nature of the K12 educational environment. The Statewide Pandemic Education Response Team may need to consider a combination of social distancing/group gathering and personal protective measures/screening protocols to best mitigate exposure to COVID-19 while planning for a return to school that ensures the safety and well-being of all stakeholders.

Personal Protective Measures and Screening Protocols

Given that social distancing and group gatherings in the K12 environment will be challenging, regardless of the ratios and guidance established, protocols for increased personal protective measures and screening in the K12 educational setting must be developed and issued. If guidance is issued that all students may return to school buildings at one time and with the traditional model of service delivery, the preventative actions to ensure protective equipment and screening will be imperative. Components of such preventative measure protocols include, but are not limited to:

Personal Protective Measures

- Identify preventative supplies that must be within each classroom, educational space and common area within a school building. Such supplies include:
 - Masks, gloves, soap, sanitizer, etc.
 - Digital thermometers for every school building
- Protocols for student, staff and visitors regarding the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Design and issue infographic communication regarding preventative measures (e.g. distancing, handwashing, PPE, etc.) that can be utilized by each school district

Disinfection and Cleaning Protocols

- Standards for disinfection and cleaning of all areas and surfaces throughout the day.
- Disinfectant machines/equipment (e.g. Clorox 360) for every school building
- Protocols for if a student or staff tests positive for COVID-19.

Daily Screening

- Daily screening and/or rapid testing protocols for entry of students, families, staff and visitors that include temperature checks each day
- Onsite nursing staff at each school building to guide and oversee screenings
- Limiting visitors on-campus (e.g. mentors, vendors, family visits - lunch with students)

When issuing guidance and determining readiness for implementation of personal preventative measures and screening protocols in the K12 environment, the state would need to ensure financial support for increasing the personnel, programmatic and operational capacity to adhere to the regulations. This would include assurances that each district can secure, at minimum, 30-days of supplies for every school building.

Contractual Working Conditions for Employees

Statewide, employees are being asked to be flexible due to the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 crisis. Superintendents are committed to working with unions during this crisis to successfully reopen schools.

Parental Options for Virtual Instruction

Establish statewide guidelines for when parents need to enroll in virtual and/or home education should they not want their student to attend in-person or blended (hybrid) instruction offered by local school systems.

Establish District Practices for Return to School

Each school district will need to clearly define and articulate the local plan for re-opening of schools. Plans must adhere to the regulations developed by the Statewide K12 Pandemic Response Team. Local plans must be developed in collaboration with local health/medical professionals to ensure the safety and well-being of students, families and educational professionals.

Local K12 Pandemic Response Team

Creation of a cross-functional local team that includes health/medical professionals to establish the medical trend guidelines for re-opening schools using the statewide components of the *Return to School* plan. Local K12 Pandemic Response Teams will ensure that all local context, supports and barriers are addressed and problem-solved in a manner which reflects the community it serves. Local response team will meet on an iterative basis to develop, monitor and make recommendations throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Local Reopening of Schools Plans

Local school districts must create and submit comprehensive *Return to School* plans that include the following components. All *Return to School* plans must be vetted by the Local K12 Pandemic Response Team and communicated so all stakeholders have access. District level plans will include preparation for:

- **Social Distancing and Large Group Gatherings:** aligned to statewide guidance
- **Personal Preventative and Screening Protocols:** for students, staff and visitors
- **Disinfection and Cleaning Protocols:** including systemic and building level planning
- **Procurement Plan:** aligned to the availability of items necessary to ensure safety and well-being for new protocols
- **Instructional Delivery Models:** planning, should the need arise, for hybrid, phased or virtual instruction and the supports needed for social-emotional supports identified with the return to school
- **Staffing Plan:** denoting increases needed to support operational or programmatic shifts aligned to statewide guidance
- **Professional Development Plan for all employees:** aligned to each component of the comprehensive plan

- **Financial Impact Tracking:** to account for costs associated with increased personnel, programmatic or operations changes necessary to adhere to guidelines and/or regulations
- **Communication Plan:** for all stakeholder groups for each applicable component
- **Monitoring Plan:** including systemic and building level practices

Conclusion

While these are preliminary and broad recommendations for statewide or local *Return to School* considerations, there are many additional details and barriers that will need to be considered. The majority of the recommendations align to operational guidelines to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the students and staff within public schools across the state of Florida.

As leaders of local school systems, it is our responsibility to also be planning for the academic and social-emotional well-being of our communities. With this in mind, addressing the potential COVID-19 academic slide must also continue to be part of the collaborative work between the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) and school systems. Pending the guidance derived from the recommendations above, FADSS anticipates the need to develop and implement a hybrid or phased model of instructional delivery that encompasses both online and in person/in school instruction. In addition, as outlined in the FADSS proposal for the K12 CARES Act Governor’s Emergency Relief Funds, we must address the educational slide and achievement gap through a multi-faceted approach of innovative summer and school year programming. The needs of our students are vast and considerations for under-performing and/or vulnerable populations are imperative.

To meet these challenges, we will need additional resources that take into account all available funding sources that can support the increased personnel, programming and operational capacity to implement what we know is essential. School districts in the state of Florida continue to demonstrate our willingness and ability to meet the needs of our students during this unprecedented health crisis. Just as we seamlessly developed virtual learning systems in a matter of weeks, we will rise to the challenge to identify and eliminate any academic slide that may occur.

We know there will be barriers, such as procuring supplies for medical screenings and personal protective equipment, that we must overcome together with the support of our state officials and medical/health professionals. The members of FADSS and our teams are mission driven, focused, innovative and creative. Working together with the best-interest of our communities at the center, we know we can meet the safety, health, well-being and academic needs of our students.