

# FAQ on State and District Response to COVID-19 Outbreak

How can schools reconfigure schedules and classrooms to accommodate social distancing?

Regional Educational  
Laboratory  
Northeast & Islands

From the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES

## How can schools reconfigure schedules and classrooms to accommodate social distancing?

As schools and districts plan for the next school year, they need to determine how to make accommodations to protect students and staff from COVID-19. Schools and districts can consult guidance on how to support social distancing through a variety of means such as scheduling or classroom configuration.

## What are examples of plans to reopen schools in the fall? Should some grades start with a virtual program, for example?

- Schools can plan and prepare for different scenarios in case schools need to close again, such as mostly in-person, hybrid, and 100% remote learning.
- Some options for hybrid models include:
  - Elementary school students attending school in-person and older students attending remotely, or attending year-round in-person with periodic breaks
  - Schools use a combination of in-person and remote learning, with students attending on alternate days or some attending in the morning and some in the afternoon
- Schools may consider what implications different schedules have for things like access to technology and internet, contractual requirements for teachers, and daycare or afterschool care.
- Schools may want to provide options for telework and virtual learning for high risk staff and students.
- Regardless of the chosen schedule, it is helpful to have clear expectations for virtual and in-person student and staff attendance.

## Related links

- <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/ReopeningPASchools.pdf>
- <https://www.sreb.org/calendars-and-schedules>
- <https://www.schoolresourcehub.org/reentry>
- <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Blueprint-for-Back-to-School.pdf>

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>
- <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/reopening-schools-covid-19-brief>
- [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52_4)

### **What are suggestions for reconfiguring classrooms to accommodate social distancing?**

- Schools can reconfigure desks by using dividers, assigning students to seats that are spaced six feet apart, turning desks to face in the same direction, or having students sit on only one side of tables that are spaced apart.
- This may require reducing class size and finding additional space. Schools can repurpose communal spaces such as the gym, cafeteria, or outdoor areas for additional classroom space.
- Schools can also maintain social distancing by keeping students in a homeroom and rotating teachers in and out of classrooms, limiting staff to working with one to two classes, or keeping the same group of students with the same staff.
- Schools can support social distancing outside of classrooms by:
  - Staggering arrival and dismissal times and providing for multiple arrival locations
  - Staggering mealtimes to keep students from congregating in large groups or serving meals in classrooms instead of the cafeteria
  - Limiting school bus seating to one child per seat, in every other row
  - Limiting events and activities to those where participants can maintain social distancing
- It will be important to train staff how to practice social distancing in schools and how to teach and model these practices for students.

### **Related links**

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- [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19\\_reopen-america-schools.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19_reopen-america-schools.pdf)

### **Are there samples of pandemic response policy?**

- See the following for pre-COVID-19 guidance on responding to infectious diseases:
  - [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools \(REMS\) Technical Assistance Center: Recovery Fact Sheet](#)
 Four components of recovery:
  - Academics recovery

- Physical and structural recovery
- Business functions recovery
- Social, emotional, and behavioral recovery
- [US Department of Education Emergency Response and Crisis Management \(ECRM\) Technical Assistance Center: Schools Respond to Infectious Disease](#)  
See Step 4: Recovery (disinfection, period of adjustment, mental health issues)

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- [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19\\_reopen-america-schools.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/covid19_reopen-america-schools.pdf)
- [https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/Recovery\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_508C.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/Recovery_Fact_Sheet_508C.pdf)
- [https://rems.ed.gov/docs/PandemicFluNewsletter\\_072106.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/PandemicFluNewsletter_072106.pdf)

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