Guidance for Virginia Public and Private preK-12 Schools Submitting COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plans

Per an order from the Virginia Public Health Commissioner, each private school and public school division must develop a plan for implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies before reopening in accordance with the *Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools*. Plans must be submitted to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). This document provides guidance for schools and school divisions in developing and submitting such plans.

Eligibility:
The public health order applies to any private or public school operating in the Commonwealth. Public school divisions may submit one single form; private schools must submit individually.

Residential and boarding schools should reference the *Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidance* for additional information on mitigation strategies for residential schools for components that are unique to those settings (e.g. residence halls, communal dining, housing for isolation/quarantine, health services, etc).

Those schools which have been previously issued a variance to operate by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, may continue to operate under the terms of such variance. They have until July 15, 2020 to submit a plan to VDOE under this order for those existing programs. They must also submit plans for expansion of program offerings under the Phase II or Phase III guidance.

If schools begin offering programs in Phase II, they must submit their plan before opening in Phase II. If schools do not offer programs in Phase II but reopen in Phase III, they must submit before opening in Phase III.

Logistics:
Plans must be posted online and submitted to the VDOE before schools reopen under the Phase II or Phase III guidance. The plan will be submitted to the Virginia Department of Education via an online form. [Public school divisions should submit Phase II plans online here](); [Private schools should submit Phase II plans online here]().

Key Elements of School Plans:

Referencing [CDC guidance]() and the *Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools*, schools must prepare COVID-19 mitigation plans for reopening as even in Phases II and III of the Forward Virginia Blueprint, it is likely that outbreaks of COVID-19 will continue. Therefore, the plans outlined in this section should consider various contingencies for continuing operations in the event of an outbreak. Schools must report cases and outbreaks to their local health department, and consult with their respective local health department regarding management of outbreaks, dismissals or similar decisions such as a shutdown of school activities.

Guiding Principles

The more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. The risk of COVID-19 spread increases in school settings as follows:

- Lowest Risk: Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
- More Risk: Small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Groups of students stay together and with the same teacher throughout/across school days and groups do not mix. Students remain at least 6 feet apart and do not share objects (e.g., hybrid virtual and in-person class structures, or staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes).
- Highest Risk: Full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students are not spaced apart, share classroom materials or supplies, and mix between classes and activities.
  Strategies that will assist in successful planning should center around promoting behaviors that reduce spread of COVID-19, maintaining healthy environments and operations and, preparing for and acting when someone gets sick and/or presents with symptoms.

    At a minimum, plans must address the following considerations:

1) **Planning to reopen**
   a. Establish a COVID-19 team within the school division and a point person at each school facility.
   b. Know the contact information and procedures for reaching the local health department.
   c. Plan for health and absenteeism monitoring/approaches.
   d. Develop a communications strategy that includes:
      i. Orientation and training for staff and students specific to new COVID-19 mitigation strategies;
      ii. Plans for communication with staff, parents, and students of new policies;
      iii. Plans for how to communicate an outbreak or positive cases detected at the school.
   e. Participate in community response efforts
   f. Prepare your division's student health services:
   g. Assure provision of medical-grade PPE for health services staff;
   h. Assure and maintain typical (non-COVID-19) health services;
   i. For the provision of mental health services.

2) **Promoting Behaviors That Reduce Spread of COVID-19**
   a. Create an education/training plan for staff, students and families. Consider COVID-19 prevention education (hand washing, staying home if ill, etc.). Education should be part of staff and student orientations and to be sent to all parties before reopening schools and include:
      i. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,
      ii. Use of cloth face coverings,
      iii. Staying home when sick,
      iv. Encouraging physical distancing.

b. Maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene.
c. Provide signs and messaging to promote healthy hygiene.
d. Promote physical distancing
    i. Modify layouts of classrooms, communal areas and buses to ensure social distancing is maintained.
    ii. Develop strategies for food/dining services; these should be consistent with plans to optimize physical distancing.
    iii. Limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing place during gatherings.
    iv. Follow relevant Virginia Phase Guidance[1] for Schools and CDC guidance for recreational sports for school-related sports and other recreational activities.

3) **Maintaining Healthy Environments**
a. Plan for daily health screening questions of staff and students.
b. Hygiene Practices:
    i. Create cleaning and disinfection protocols that include frequently touched surfaces; transport vehicles; schedules for increased cleaning, routine cleaning, and disinfection; ensuring adequate cleaning supplies and correct use/storage.
    ii. Provide additional hand sanitizer/handwashing stations.
    iii. Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing to the extent possible (e.g. dedicated student supplies, lab equipment, computers, etc).
c. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible.
d. Ensure that water systems and features are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.

4) **Maintaining Healthy Operations**
a. Implement protections for staff and children at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
b. Align plans for gatherings, field trips and volunteer restrictions consistent with any Executive Order in place.
c. Implement sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed.
d. Train back-up staff to ensure continuity of operations.

5) **Protecting vulnerable individuals (e.g. 65+, underlying health conditions):**
a. Create policy options to support those at higher risk for severe illness to limit their exposure risk (e.g. telework, modified job duties, virtual learning opportunities).
b. Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed.
c. Develop policies for return to class/work after COVID-19 illness.

6) **Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick**

    a. Separate and isolate those who present with symptoms.
    b. Facilitate safe transportation of those of who are sick to home or healthcare facility.
    c. Implement cleansing and disinfection procedures of areas used by sick individuals.
    d. Develop a communications plan with local health department to initiate public health investigation, contact tracing and consultation on next steps.

7) **Planning to close down if necessary, due to severe conditions.**
    a. Determine which conditions will trigger a reduction in in-person classes.
    b. Determine which conditions will trigger complete school closure.

8) **Overnight boarding schools should consult** *the Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidelines* **and [guidelines for Congregate Settings](#)** for additional information and recommendations.