



Region

Wisconsin Education Association Council

Conditions for a Safe and Responsible Return to School

For the safety of our children, our educators and the general public, it is imperative that school district decision makers listen to the science and our public health experts about what is needed to return to in-person learning in schools. The following are science-based conditions that need to be in place in order to prevent mass infections and super spreading events as a result of a return to face to face learning in schools.

We are publicly rating each school district's reopening plan based on these criteria.

1. **Phase-In to In-Person Learning.** A substantial and continuous decline in the community in new COVID-19 cases for at least 21 consecutive days AND overall rates of community infections reaching a safe level like Yellow or Green on the [Harvard Global Health Institute Key Metrics](#) scale before a phased in return to face-to-face instruction takes place.

Rationale: If rates of coronavirus infection are high and rising in the community, many children and staff will report to school carrying the infection and likely cause super spreading events. All other countries that are opening schools to in-person learning have only done so when infection rates in the community are low enough that very few, if any, infected people will show up to school.

2. **School Based COVID-19 Testing and Tracing.** Testing of staff and students with symptoms must be school-based, meaning schools are involved in the process and immediately notified of results.

Rationale: Schools can not afford to wait for potentially infected students and staff to

go to an unrelated health care provider or testing site and then wait several days for the results. [Testing must be integrated with the school](#) so that results are provided as immediately as possible and follow up can occur.

3. Regular Testing of Staff and Students. Conduct regular testing for COVID-19 for staff and students who come into contact with many other people at school. Immediately contact trace any positive cases.

Rationale: We can not afford to just passively wait for symptomatic people to appear and be tested. Like professional athletes, educators and students who are in [contact with many other people](#) at school should be regularly and randomly tested to make sure that a disastrous outbreak is not occurring.

4. Established and Public Reclosing Matrix. Have a plan for what will happen when any positive cases of COVID-19 are identified among students or staff, including a [reclosing matrix](#) which takes into account community spread, number of confirmed cases within a school and the district, the clustering of cases, and the availability of subs.

Rationale: Time is of the essence if positive cases are identified. This June a middle school in Israel found two positive cases of COVID-19 after reopening. By protocol, they immediately shut the school down and found that over 100 students were actually infected.

5. Mandatory Mask Wearing by All Staff and Students. Unless there is a very good reason like a health condition preventing it, everyone in school buildings should be required to wear masks at all times.

Rationale: The [science is absolutely definitive](#) that mask wearing by people who are infected and people who are not infected greatly reduces transmission rates. This is a cheap, simple and necessary requirement.

6. Cohort Staff and Students. Arrange education so that no staff or student interacts with more than a [very limited number of people](#). For example, elementary classes can be split into A/B format so that teachers, aides and students only interact face-to-face with 15 other people at most.

Rationale: With lunch, passing time and multiple classes, students and staff can come into contact with dozens or even hundreds of other people in the normal operation of a school. This level of contact will inevitably cause super spreading infection events

that jeopardize not only students and staff, but the whole community. [Limiting contacts through cohorts](#) can dramatically contain the spread from any one infected person.

7. Six Feet Social Distancing. Arrange all learning environments, passing environments and transportation environments so that six feet distance can be maintained and require such distancing for all staff and students.

Rationale: Scientists and public health experts concluded months ago that [six feet of distance](#) is necessary to prevent infections through droplets that people emit when coughing, sneezing or even speaking.

8. Daily, In-Building Temperature Checks. All students and staff have their temperature checked at the beginning of each day in order to monitor for possible COVID-19 infection. Any person whose temperature is above a threshold should be immediately quarantined away from other students and staff.

Rationale: Many parents feel pressure to send their children to school even when symptomatic. Often people with a fever may not even realize they have a fever unless their temperature is checked. This is an affordable, necessary way to monitor for potentially infected students and staff.

9. Minimum Thresholds for Air Circulation and Quality. Schools must meet standards for proper air circulation such as ASHRAE's standard of no more than 1000ppm CO₂ levels. Schools must install [high quality air filters](#) that remove viruses such as UV filters. Building inspections by an independent agency should determine schools' readiness in this area.

Rationale: Scientists and public health experts have continued to learn more about [how the coronavirus spreads](#). Many now believe the most significant source of infection is [aerosol \(tiny\) particles of virus](#) that can linger in uncirculated air for hours. The [longer a person is exposed](#), the more likely they become infected. Many schools [lack adequate circulation and filtration](#) of indoor air, creating a [dangerous environment](#) for staff and students.

10. Modified Coronavirus Sick Leave Policies. Additional paid leave for staff who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases or related quarantining.

Rationale: Staff should be incentivized to stay home if they are symptomatic or live

with someone who is infected with coronavirus. Banked sick leave should not be depleted and [no one should have to take unpaid leave](#) as a result of the pandemic.

11. Accommodations for Vulnerable Staff and Students. Districts must have a plan to allow students and staff who are medically at-risk or who live with people who are medically at-risk to continue their employment and education.

Rationale: People should not have to give up their education or their careers and livelihoods due to a [vulnerability to death or complications](#) from COVID-19. School districts successfully managed alternative learning methods this spring and can continue to do so for vulnerable students and staff.

12. Frontline Educators and their Associations Involved in All Planning. Planning for a return to school needs to include actual practitioners and their professional associations in order to address myriad challenges like avoiding sharing of resources, avoiding policies detrimental to education, and providing a rich curriculum with art, music and physical education.

Rationale: Many districts are drawing up plans with little or no involvement of the people who actually interact with students and families. Frontline educators know best what is feasible and what is safe. They and their local associations should be intimately involved in all planning for face-to-face learning.

13. Adequate Health Personnel. Personnel with medical expertise need to be readily available to monitor and respond to students and staff who become sick at school.

Rationale: It is critical that medical professionals be available to respond to potential coronavirus outbreaks.

14. Substitute Availability. Established plan for substitute availability that includes inclusion in quarantine and sick-day protocols and moving to virtual options to avoid staff displacement during low availability.

Rationale: Even before the pandemic the lack of available substitute teachers and aides was a crisis for many school districts. The problem has become even more acute due to the fact that many substitutes are older people who will not choose to be available with the threat of coronavirus at hand.