

In-Person Learning Resources for Parents and Caregivers at Chicago Public Schools

A Resource Created by Healthy Schools Campaign for Parents
and Caregivers in Chicago Public Schools

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HEALTHY SCHOOLS
CAMPAIGN

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Welcome! Bienvenidos!

After almost a year of school closures and remote learning due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) reopened in-person learning for students in kindergarten through eighth grade on March 1, 2021. The District has established overall guidelines for schools to follow. These guidelines allow for schools to create detailed plans based on specific conditions, resources and needs. Parents and caregivers who have chosen to send their children back to school need to be well informed about both public health guidelines and CPS guidelines so that they can be active partners working with their principals, teachers and other school officials to ensure safety in their buildings. This document is intended to help you answer the question: Is my school taking the right steps to keep students safe?

There will always be risk associated with returning to school during a pandemic, but it can be kept lower if districts and schools adopt strategies designed to keep students and staff safe, encourage healthy compliance with those strategies, isolate outbreaks when they occur and communicate transparently and effectively. In this document, you will find best practices from public health experts for school reopening during COVID-19; comparisons between those practices and the policies at CPS; and information your school administrators, principals and district officials should be providing to parents and Local School Councils to support a safe return to school.

Public health experts agree that safely opening schools to in-person learning is a group effort that requires coordination of an infection control team within a building, along with the coordination and cooperation of teachers, staff, administrators and community members. As parents and caregivers, you are an important member of that team. You also have the right to hold your school leaders accountable for adhering to safety measures and best practices.

Your Rights

While there is no guarantee that in-person school will not introduce a risk of COVID-19 into your household, you have the right to hold the district and your school accountable for maintaining the highest level of safety in the school building.

Each district-run Chicago public school has a Local School Council (LSC) that serves as the policy-making body of the school and makes important decisions such as developing and monitoring the school's academic plan, approving the school budget and selecting and evaluating the school's principal. While most LSCs are elected, some are appointed and have more limited powers. Since Chicago remains the only school district in Illinois without an elected school board, LSCs are an important oversight and decision-making body that parents and caregivers can leverage to hold education leaders accountable and create space for dialogue and engagement. You can find out who is on your school's LSC by visiting the [CPS website](#). In the case of the current pandemic, several LSCs have shared their concerns about reopening schools with school and district leaders.

CPS is led by CEO Dr. Janice Jackson and CPS Board President Miguel del Valle, both of whom were appointed by Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Parents and caregivers have the right to reach out to the [school district](#), [school board](#) and [city leaders](#) if they cannot get the answers they need from their local schools.

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by [the Path to Zero from the Brown School of Public Health](#), [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). As scientists learn more about the spread of COVID-19 in schools, including newer, more transmissible strains of the virus, regulatory agencies and public health experts will continue to update their best practices. This is a living document that will continue to be revised as we learn more.

Tracking COVID-19 in Your Community

Public health guidance now states that the decision to open schools to in-person learning should be determined based on rates of in-school transmission and the ability to use infection control protocol in buildings, and not based on community spread. (Community spread refers to how many people have been infected with the virus in a specific geographic area.)

In addition, updated public health guidance prioritizes younger students (in grades K - 5) for in person learning, even in areas with high community spread. CPS is opening for in-person learning only to students in grades K - 8. High school students will remain in remote learning at this point.

CPS is sharing data about COVID-19 cases to keep families, students, and staff informed about in-school transmission on its [school re-opening website](#). (Scroll down to the bottom of the page under “Tracking COVID-19: Actionable Cases” to view those numbers.) These figures are also updated in a [public spreadsheet](#). Cases may be sorted by school building. Case counts are updated weekly on Monday through Friday (excluding holidays) after impacted individuals are notified. Case counts represent the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases associated with CPS buildings. This data only includes people who were present in CPS buildings during the contagious period. As schools reopen, it will be important for CPS to continuously update in-school transmission information every week.

CPS also [has published a document](#) that shares data on each school building’s preparedness for re-opening. Data is updated regularly with information about the facilities and the delivery of materials and supplies to support safe reopening of the building. Parents and caregivers may check this spreadsheet to see more specifically which remediations have been made at their school building, or to communicate with leaders and administrators in your school building about health and safety. Refer to this document when communicating with the administrators in your building about the measures taken to promote health and safety.

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Transportation

Before we talk about in-school safety, we must first look at how our students are getting to school. Transportation to and from school must be as safe as the building environment for school reopenings to succeed.

What Experts Say

Some of the most effective ways to control the spread of COVID-19 on the way to and from school include:

- Mask wearing by all people on school buses and public transportation, including students and drivers
- Windows on school buses should be cracked open at least 3 inches
- Plexiglass barriers between students and the driver when possible
- Reduced number of students on each school bus to allow for physical distancing
- Unchanging bus seating assignments that require siblings to sit with each other
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting protocol on school buses
- Hand sanitizer available on school buses
- Hand washing immediately after leaving public transportation

What CPS Says

Students must wear cloth face coverings while on the school bus. School bus aides will wear appropriate PPE and offer students hand sanitizer before and after boarding the school bus. Students will sit by themselves or only with a sibling and be spaced to ensure proper physical distancing. The CPS reopening plan does not state what communication, if any, will be shared if someone on the school bus contracts COVID-19.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has planned infection control strategies for school transportation that align with public health experts' best practices. Parents and caregivers should also ask questions about cleaning protocol and air circulation on buses and contact tracing based on bus assignments. Some questions to ask your school leaders on the topic of transportation include:

- Will I be contacted if someone, including the bus driver or another adult, who is on my child's school bus contracts COVID-19?
- Will my child be required to quarantine for 10 days if they rode the same school bus as someone who has tested positive?
- How will masks on school buses be enforced without distracting the bus driver?
- How frequently will the school bus be cleaned and what cleaning procedures will be followed?
- Will all school bus windows be open during the entirety of the ride throughout the school year, even cold months?
- How will CPS ensure protocols are being followed by the independent school bus companies?
- How will CPS ensure that enough buses will be available to support physical distancing?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Symptom Screening

Your school should reinforce a culture of health, safety and shared responsibility among all students, staff and families. One of the most important ways to do this is to encourage that all members of the school community be educated on the symptoms of COVID-19, that they know to stay home when sick and to ensure that symptoms are checked prior to entry into the school building.

What Experts Say

It is very important that no student, teacher or staff member comes to school with any symptoms of sickness. Symptom screening recommendations from public health experts include:

- Parents and caregivers may be asked to confirm that their student is not sick before school each day, and teachers may be asked to self-report their own symptoms.
- Adults in the school should be trained to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19, and schools should [have a plan to isolate individuals who present with symptoms while inside the school](#).
- Schools may implement temperature or other health checks to identify potential cases.
- School policies regarding attendance requirements may be changed to reflect the seriousness of COVID-19.

What CPS Says

All CPS students, staff and approved visitors will be asked to complete an online symptom screener questionnaire each day they are planning on entering a CPS building. Parents or a designated family member need to complete the daily questionnaire on behalf of each child. Any staff member or visitor who comes to school without taking the questionnaire will be screened upon arrival at school. If they fail the screening, they will be sent home. Additionally, all staff, students, and visitors will be asked to undergo daily temperature checks once they arrive at school.

Drop off times will be staggered and students will enter the building through assigned entrances alongside their pods to ensure proper physical distancing. Upon entering the building, students will wash their hands and use hand sanitizer.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has included policies that screen for symptoms prior to allowing entry to CPS buildings. You can ask your school the following questions related to the follow-through of these policies and how the school plans to treat individuals who arrive at school showing symptoms.

- How will the school avoid crowding at arrival as symptoms are checked and temperatures are taken for each student?
- Who will be responsible for temperature checks on arrival and ensuring that symptom checks are complete?
- Where is the space to quarantine symptomatic students located, and who is in charge of supervising that space?
- What is the school's contact tracing and quarantining plan?
- Will all of my children have the same arrival time?
- How does staggered arrival time affect school buses?
- How will the school prevent symptom/positive result shaming?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Action When Someone Gets Sick

With community spread still relatively high throughout Chicago and the rest of the United States, someone at your student's school may get sick with COVID-19. When that happens, your school must follow a clear plan that includes contact tracing, rapid communication and quarantining that is conducted in partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH).

What Experts Say

School districts must have clear plans in the event that a student, teacher, or staff member becomes infected. Recommendations for actions when someone at a school gets sick include:

- A contact tracing protocol may be developed in partnership with or by the local board of health. A rapid communication plan to inform parents, caregivers, teachers, and staff members of infections in the school is needed.
- A testing protocol may also be developed to refer individuals to testing centers.
- Schools should have clear guidance indicating when students and staff should quarantine and when they are allowed to return to school. While the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has indicated that 10 days is allowable in certain circumstances, state and local health departments are still encouraging a full 14 days.
- Schools must frequently update their plans as the number of cases and hospitalizations changes in the surrounding community and be prepared to close if necessary.
- Schools should have a point-person or team to lead the COVID-19 response. This person should have a plan that ensures that information is quickly and accurately shared to school administration, teachers, parents, caregivers, students, and community members.
- Schools should provide frequent communication regarding school policies through a variety of media.

What CPS Says

CPS policy states that anyone who is experiencing symptoms must not come to school. Any school staff member, teacher or student who is sick should not return to school until they meet the following requirements, whether or not they were tested for COVID-19:

- at least 10 days have passed since COVID-19 symptoms first appeared; and,
- at least one day (24 hours) has passed since fever has resolved (no fever without the use of fever reducing medications) and all other symptoms are improving.

If there is a positive case, staff and the families of students who have been identified as close contacts will be notified that they must quarantine for 14 days from the initial testing date before returning to school, even if they have a negative test and are free of symptoms.

CPS has hired dedicated staff to support contact tracing and will work in coordination with CDPH to ensure that those identified as close contacts have rapid contact tracing and are connected to city resources such as monitoring and testing. Those who had direct contact with someone with COVID-19 (were within six feet of the person with COVID-19 for 15 consecutive minutes or more) should quarantine at home and monitor their symptoms for 14 calendar days from the last time they were in direct contact with the ill person. Individuals who did not have direct contact with the person who is sick (were six feet apart from the individual with COVID-19 and spent less than 15 consecutive minutes with them) can return to the building immediately after disinfection of the relevant space. CPS will help students gain access to a free COVID-19 test.

The district is offering a [voluntary COVID-19 surveillance testing program](#) for school-based staff. The stated aim of their surveillance testing program is to measure and monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 among asymptomatic staff in its schools. On a weekly basis, 25 percent of staff will be tested, and all staff should expect to be tested at least once per month. Principals will receive a roster of staff who will be tested each week.

While the CPS website provides aggregate data on the number of COVID cases by schools by week, the information per individual school only shows information about the number of cases per quarter.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS will work with the Chicago Department of Public Health to [help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in school buildings](#). As a parent, you may still want to know more about the contact tracing process. This may include questions such as:

- How will quarantining times be enforced?
- Will the whole school be notified about a COVID-19 case in real time or only the pod that is being impacted? Will the data about COVID-19 cases that are being tracked and reported to the district on a weekly basis be shared in weekly totals with the school community?
- How will my student continue to learn if they need to quarantine due to contact tracing concerns?
- Will absentee policies be adapted to reflect the need to quarantine?
- Who will teach my student's class if the teacher needs to be quarantined for up to 14 days? How is staffing of substitute teachers being handled, and how is their contact with other student pods being reduced?
- What if my student's bus driver gets sick?
- How will quarantining be handled if the positive test comes from a teacher that rotates between pods?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Mask Wearing

COVID-19 is primarily spread through respiratory droplets and smaller aerosols, which are transmitted through the air when people breathe, talk, cough and sneeze. Masks can limit the spread of droplets and smaller aerosols. This is called “source control.” Masks can also help protect their wearers against COVID-19.

What Experts Say

Schools should require masks for all students and staff, for everyone who is on school property at all times.

Recommendations from experts include:

- Schools should have plans to enforce mask wearing on campus and on buses.
- Students, families and staff should be trained on how to wear and care for masks, and which masks are effective.
- If there are concerns about a parent, student, or teacher’s ability to obtain and care for a mask, the school should make them available to everyone.
- “Masks breaks” throughout the day may be scheduled during times when transmission risk is relatively lower, such as quiet reading time or outdoor recess.
- Masks should be two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Masks should cover the nose and mouth and fit snugly on the face without gaps.
- Face shields are not recommended as a substitute for masks.
- Plexiglass shields may be used in reception desk areas, the cafeteria cashier or between the teacher and class. Even when plexiglass shields are in place, everyone should wear masks.
- Change a mask when it becomes wet (from breathing, snow or other precipitation). A wet mask is less efficient and harder to breathe through. Reusable masks should be placed in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed at home.
- Scarves and ski masks used for warmth are not suitable for use as masks to prevent spread of COVID-19. They may be worn over a mask.

What CPS Says

Anyone over the age of two is required to wear a face covering on school grounds. To support this effort, the district has purchased three reusable face coverings for each student and staff member. The district will also distribute disposable masks for emergency use.

Face shields are not acceptable for students unless they have a documented medical reason that is approved by the district. Parents and caregivers may supply children with their own cloth face coverings as long as it covers the child’s nose and mouth and has at least two layers. Students with certain medical conditions can apply for a mask exemption.

Every school will have face masks for all staff members. Staff members who provide personal, one-on-one support for students will receive a face shield. A face shield should only be worn in addition to a mask.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has a thorough policy of mask-wearing and plans to provide masks for any staff members or students who do not have a mask. You may still have questions about the enforcement of mask wearing, certain exceptions and how to ensure the mask you provide for your student is effective. Consider asking the following questions of your school leaders:

- How will teachers monitor proper mask wearing among their students?
- Will masks be provided if a student loses their mask or a mask becomes broken?

- What if a student in my child’s class has a mask-wearing exception? Will I be notified and what options will I have? Will accommodations be made to ensure my child is protected?
- What is the protocol for mask handling before and after meals as well as during recess?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Hygiene

Frequent handwashing is one of the most important ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Handwashing with soap and water, or with the use of hand sanitizer, removes the virus from hands.

What Experts Say

Hands should be washed with soap and water for 20 to 30 seconds frequently throughout the school day. Handwashing best practices from public health experts include:

- Students and staff should wash their hands upon arrival and before and after touching shared surfaces, eating, touching the face, recess, physical education, and transitioning between classes.
- While handwashing with soap and water is best, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol or ethanol is an effective alternative when handwashing is unavailable.
- All students and staff should be trained in proper handwashing and sanitizing procedures, and signage should be placed at sinks to reinforce appropriate handwashing technique and duration.
- Hand sanitizer or portable handwashing stations should be available throughout the school. Other strategies the school may implement include [installing no-contact infrastructure](#) (like touchless sinks).

What CPS Says

All students and staff will be asked to wash or sanitize their hands upon entering the building, after restroom breaks, and when traveling to a different classroom. Hand sanitizer will be provided to every classroom and hand sanitizing stations will be set up near every classroom and in high-traffic areas such as entrances and elevators. In addition to signage and public awareness campaigns that will help all students understand when and how to properly wash their hands and use hand sanitizer, schools should teach health protocols to students directly.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has made hygiene an important part of its infection control policy and is planning to provide adequate supplies to ensure that all students and staff can wash hands frequently throughout the day. Parents and caregivers may still want to ask the following questions:

- Will my student have the opportunity to wash hands before meals, or before and after touching a shared surface? How will handwashing be facilitated to avoid crowding?
- How will CPS ensure that handwashing and sanitizing stations remain filled?
- Where will handwashing and hand sanitizer stations be located?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that all students are properly washing hands?
- How will the class be conducted so that there is not a long line for handwashing many times throughout the day?
- Will students be allowed to bring their own hand sanitizer to school?
- How often will hand soap and hand sanitizers be filled?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Physical Distancing

Maintaining distance between individuals reduces COVID-19 transmission by reducing the intensity of exposure to infectious droplets. Physical distancing should be encouraged whenever and wherever possible inside the school building. Group distancing, in the form of “pods” at schools, means that students in one class are kept separate from students in other classes.

What Experts Say

All schools should ensure that the maximum physical distance is maintained whenever possible inside and outside of the classroom. Most public health experts agree that at least six feet is best but that three feet is adequate for younger student populations. Best practices to achieve consistent physical distancing throughout the school day include:

- Teachers and administrators should maximize their distance from students as much as possible, for as long as possible.
- Strategies such as spreading desks out in the classroom, staggering bathroom breaks or class transition times, and discontinuing locker use may aid in physical distancing.
- Schools may remove excess furniture from classrooms.
- Schools may also group students by class or in smaller groups, and allow students in those groups (sometimes called “pods”) to be nearer to each other than six feet.
- Specialized teachers may rotate between classrooms instead of having students move between classrooms.
- If there is limited space for a class to practice physical distancing, students within the class could be further organized into smaller pods that stay together throughout the day.

What CPS Says

Students and teachers will remain in fixed pods of approximately 15 students once they are in the building and throughout the full day. Teachers will rotate across a minimal number of pods in order to provide students access to all core content classes. Pods will stay physically distanced from one another in the building to avoid intermingling. Students and teachers will remain physically distanced within each classroom to the extent possible.

Schools should ensure six feet of physical distance between students and staff at times when intermingling could occur, such as arrival and dismissal. Specialized teachers (art, music, PE, library, technology) will interact with a maximum of 10 pods at a time and conduct lessons in home classrooms, limiting time traveled in shared spaces by students.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has focused on using a pod system to limit exposure to a small amount of students throughout in-school experiences. In addition, CPS is using a six-foot rule of physical distance between pods. Some of the questions you may consider asking your school leaders include:

- What is the plan for ensuring physical distancing is maintained during bathroom breaks and transition times?
- What will the classroom layout look like, and how much distance will there be between students within a classroom pod?
- How will the school schedule be changed to allow for staggered arrival and departure times that accommodate pods?
- Explain how quarantining for pods will work when there are multiple children from the same household in different pods. If one child tests positive, will the classmates of that child’s siblings in the school be notified and required to quarantine?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Air Circulation

Air circulation, also referred to as ventilation, is a key component of infection control for COVID-19. Because the virus is spread through droplets that may linger in the air, it is important for all buildings to provide the best ventilation and highest level of air circulation possible. This filters out infected air and keeps fresh, pure air inside rooms. Bringing more “fresh air” into a room reduces the risk that someone would breathe in enough virus to become infected.

What Experts Say

To improve indoor air quality in schools, experts recommend 4-6 air changes per hour (ACH) for classrooms through a combination of strategies:

- Bring in more fresh outdoor air
- Filter indoor air
- Supplement ventilation
- Filtration with air cleaning devices

There is [detailed guidance from public health experts](#) on the type of air filters recommended, which portable air cleaners may be useful and how to replace filters. All re-circulated air should pass through a high-efficiency filter (those rated MERV 13 or higher). Filters should be inspected to make sure they are installed and fit correctly.

Windows should be kept open when possible and buildings should use mechanical ventilation to forcibly bring outdoor air in. Schools should keep the ventilation system running even outside of normal school hours (when janitorial staff is there, extracurricular activities, arrival/departure). Experts recommend using ultraviolet technology to help inactivate the virus, especially when options for increasing ventilation are limited.

What CPS Says

CPS hired state-certified environmental specialists to conduct indoor air quality assessments. Their reopening policy states that for a classroom to be ready for students and staff, it must have either an operating mechanical ventilation system including both an air supply and exhaust or at least one operating window and a HEPA air purifier, which the district is providing for all classrooms. Public reports from CPS do not show data on ventilation and the CPS plan does not say if MERV-13 mechanical air filters will be used.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

There is more to learn about the ways CPS is improving air circulation in its buildings. Some questions you can ask your school leaders include:

- Can you share the results of the ventilation testing that was done?
- Are you using MERV-13 or higher filters in the building’s HVAC system?
- What kinds of portable air cleaners are being used in my child’s classroom specifically?
- Will classroom windows be and stay open?
- What will happen in the case of mechanical failure to ventilation systems?
- How often will ventilation systems and portable air cleaners be serviced or checked to ensure they are running properly? Whose responsibility is this?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Cleaning

School buildings will need to be cleaned and disinfected more frequently than before. Cleaning is the removal of dirt and soil from a surface. Disinfecting is the process of killing bacteria and viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) on a surface. Any effective infection control program will need to include more frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.

What Experts Say

Shared equipment, spaces, materials, and surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected throughout the school day. Best practices for enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocol include:

- Special attention should be paid to the most highly touched surfaces, such as door handles, keyboards, light switches, sink handles, and elevator buttons.
- Products used to disinfect should be listed on [the EPA's list of safe and recommended disinfectant products](#) for use against COVID-19.
- Cleaning products can pollute the air, so deep cleaning should be done outside of normal school hours and care should be taken to open windows or [maintain high ventilation rates](#) to protect staff and students.
- Students and non-custodial staff without proper training should not be asked to use disinfectant wipes.

What CPS Says

CPS has hired 400 additional custodians to ensure that all increased cleaning protocol can be completed each day. Custodial presence will increase, and CPS will utilize a trained custodial response team for increased cleaning and disinfection in the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 at a school.

Face shields are not recommended as a substitute for a mask. CPS has purchased more than 40,000 containers of disinfectant wipes, hospital-grade disinfectant sprayers, and additional PPE for specialty roles. Every CPS school has a hospital-grade mister spray unit that will evenly apply EPA-approved disinfectant for maximum disinfection. Staff will conduct enhanced cleaning on an hourly basis. High-touch areas will be wiped down throughout the day and on an as-needed basis. Pre-K and cluster rooms will undergo enhanced cleaning on an hourly basis.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has significantly updated its cleaning processes and invested heavily in products and staff to meet stringent cleaning and disinfecting protocols as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a parent, you may want to consider the adverse effect of spraying harmful chemicals indoors and question the logistics of increased cleaning protocol. Some questions to ask your school leaders include:

- Who will be using disinfectant wipes to wipe down surfaces in my student's classroom throughout the day?
- Will my student be asked to wipe down his or her own area with a disinfectant wipe?
- Will teachers be asked to use disinfectant sprayers? Will teachers be trained on proper use of disinfectants, and provided with proper PPE?
- When exactly and how often will the hospital grade disinfectant be sprayed on my student's work surface? On the surface where my child is eating meals?
- What is the hospital grade disinfectant the school district will be using? What is the active ingredient in this product and what are the risks of exposure to this?
- How will the school track and ensure that the cleaning and disinfecting protocols are being fully implemented?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [Healthy Green Schools & Colleges Guidelines for COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection](#).

School Meals

Students should continue to receive access to nutritious meals from their schools and have the opportunity to safely eat these meals at designated times throughout the day. Many schools have adapted in-classroom mealtimes to limit travel throughout the building and exposure to other people throughout the day.

What Experts Say

Public health experts agree that, when possible, students should eat meals in the classroom and avoid large crowds in school cafeterias. Best practices for school meals include:

- In place of holding lunch in a traditional cafeteria, students may eat lunch in their classrooms. School-provided lunches may be repackaged and brought to the classroom to prevent crowding in the cafeteria.
- School meals should be held outside whenever possible.
- If the cafeteria must be used, students should maintain physical distance or be separated from one another using plexiglass shields to reduce transmission during a time when masks must be removed.
- Some schools may allow students in the same class or cohort to eat together but should maintain distance between classes or cohorts.

What CPS Says

Students will eat lunch in their classrooms, or if space allows, eat lunch in the lunchroom on a staggered schedule. Students will wash hands before and after eating. Students will use hand sanitizer every time they re-enter the classroom.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

Parents and caregivers will want to ask more questions about how meals will be handled safely, such as:

- Where will my student be eating their meals?
- Will school meals be adapted, such as will the school be serving pre-packaged foods?
- What is the school meal schedule to limit exposure to students outside of my student's pod?
- How many students will sit at one table together and how far apart will they be seated?
- What will the mask-wearing rules be in the cafeteria?
- What type of contact will my student have with cafeteria personnel and in which manner?
- Who will be supervising students in the classroom during lunch, and how many other pods will this supervisor have contact with?
- What will student responsibility regarding cleanup at the end of meals?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Outdoor Teaching + Learning

The risk of contracting coronavirus diminishes outside. In fact, there is [historic precedent](#) in how schools minimized risk to earlier plagues with outdoor classrooms. Increasing opportunities for outdoor learning can promote the development of the “whole child” while decreasing the risk of COVID-19 spread. Utilizing or repurposing outdoor spaces is a cost-effective way to reduce the burden on indoor classrooms while providing fresh air, hands-on learning opportunities, and the health benefits associated with increased access to nature.

What Experts Say

[Emerging research](#) shows that outdoor gatherings lower risk because wind disperses viral droplets, and sunlight can kill some of the virus. Outdoor spaces prevent the virus from building up in concentrated amounts and being inhaled, which can happen indoors when infected people exhale in a confined space for long stretches of time. Best practices include:

- Utilize outdoor spaces when possible. For every age group from preK through secondary school, utilizing outdoor spaces is a high priority strategy for returning students to schools with physical distancing measures in place. This guidance also applies to meals.
- Moving instruction outdoors is one of the mitigation measures that improves air quality.
- Outdoor areas require normal cleaning, but not disinfection. Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds—it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public. High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings should be cleaned routinely. Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- Hand hygiene should be emphasized before and after use of these spaces.
- Establish and clearly define rules and procedures for outdoor lessons before getting outside.
- Coordinate social distancing movement strategies and staggered schedules for outdoor learning.
- Create a schedule of who will be outdoors and when. Communicate this with teachers, administrators, staff (security), and parents.
- Identify the entrance vs the exit points; use a different door than for recess.

What CPS Says

There is no stance or mention of outdoor learning in CPS’ Reopening plan.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

Some of the questions you may consider asking your school leaders include:

- Is the school considering utilizing the outdoors for teaching and learning?
- What will the outdoor classroom layout look like, and how much distance will there be between students with a classroom pod?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#), July 2020, [U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [World Health Organization](#) and [Green Schoolyards America](#).

Recess + Outdoor Play

Recess is an important part of the school day for students of all ages. Access to unstructured free time outdoors should be incorporated as frequently as the academic schedule allows. Schools can develop strategies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in order to allow for continued use of fixed equipment (play structures) and portable equipment.

What Experts Say

Staggered recess schedules, strategies for physical distancing and increased handwashing are elements of a safer recess at schools. Best practices for providing recess time at schools include:

- Recess times should be staggered so that students in different classes can remain separate but have full use of the schoolyard during recess.
- Schools may either allow students in the same class to play together or may promote physical distancing during recess.
- Supervision should be increased to limit high-risk behaviors such as contact sports.
- Schools may increase the amount of available portable equipment (e.g., balls, hoola hoops) or allow students to sign out pieces of equipment to limit the amount of shared equipment.
- Outdoor areas require normal cleaning, but not disinfection. Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds—it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public. High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings should be cleaned routinely. Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- While direct contact with fixed equipment (play structures, like swings or slides) is likely not a major route of transmission due to virus inactivation in sunlight, increased supervision and [frequent cleaning](#) of shared equipment are strategies that can reduce overall risk during recess.
- Children and staff should wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol before and after recess.
- Masks [may be considered during outdoor recess](#). When physical distancing of more than six feet outside can be ensured, outdoor recess may be an optimal time for mask breaks for younger students.

What CPS Says

CPS playgrounds follow the lead of the [Chicago Park District guidelines](#) regarding play equipment in CPS schoolyards. Playgrounds will not be cleaned or sanitized and students and staff are expected to maintain distance while on the playground, wash hands before and after play and wear masks.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

Recess is an important part of your child's school day. There are ways that your school may ensure your child has access to recess in a safe way. Some questions to ask your school leaders include:

- Will my child get outdoor recess time during the school day? How often and for how long?
- How will recess be scheduled and managed so that students can stay within their pods?
- Who will be supervising recess?
- Will masks be mandated when children are playing at recess in their pods outside?
- How will recess time be filled if the weather does not allow for outside time?
- What other groups of students and staff will be at recess with my child's class, and how will they be separated? Who will be in charge of supervising that?

- Will the outdoor spaces (aside from the play equipment) remain available for use after school hours?
- What is the plan for safely transitioning students from the classroom to the schoolyard or other recess location and back to the classroom?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Bathroom Protocol

Schools can do everything possible to limit the use of separated pods to one classroom, but the need to use public and shared bathrooms will always be there. Issues with ventilation and touch surfaces in restrooms could make bathrooms a point of transmission for COVID-19. Schools will need to address this with updated bathroom protocols.

What Experts Say

Best practices for bathroom protocol from public health experts include:

- Transmission risk in bathrooms may be minimized by handwashing and installing touchless faucets, soap dispensers, towel dispensers, and doors.
- It may be appropriate for an adult to be present to assist with or monitor handwashing in the bathroom, particularly for small children.
- Students may wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer after they return to their classroom in a location where their teacher can monitor hand hygiene.
- Bathroom exhaust fans should run continuously, and bathroom doors should be closed at all times, even when not in use.
- Long-range airborne transmission risk in bathrooms may be further minimized by installing toilet lids, keeping lids closed when not in use, and encouraging students to close the lids before flushing.
- To enforce physical and group distancing and to minimize crowding, it may be useful to close bathrooms during transition periods and promote bathroom breaks during class time instead, to assign classrooms to use specific bathrooms or to stagger the timing of scheduled bathroom breaks by class.

What CPS Says

Pods will be assigned to designated bathrooms and will be cleaned frequently throughout the day. Schools must remind students to wash their hands thoroughly and often and use hand sanitizer any time they return to their classroom. In restrooms, every other handwashing station will be closed to accommodate physical distancing.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

It may be worth asking more about the process for supervising bathroom usage and getting more information about ventilation considerations in regards to bathrooms. Some questions to ask your building leaders include:

- Who will be in charge of monitoring bathroom usage and ensuring students will be limited to designated bathrooms?
- Will students be provided a bathroom use schedule to ensure they are not in a bathroom with students outside of their pod?
- How frequently will the bathroom be clean and disinfected throughout the day?
- How many people will be allowed in a bathroom at one time?
- Who will be supervising handwashing for younger students before and after bathroom use?
- Will handwashing stations be moved outside the bathroom to limit time spent inside the bathroom?
- Will the building be providing additional ventilation in bathrooms?
- Will students be allowed hall passes to go to the bathroom?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Physical Education + Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities and physical education classes are important parts of the school experience for students at all ages. However, these activities also pose challenges to infection control because of close physical contact, difficulty wearing masks while participating and the intermingling of students outside of designated pods.

What Experts Say

Being in close contact, breathing heavily, and sharing equipment increase risk of COVID-19 transmission but there may be ways to safely participate in extracurriculars like sports and music, and physical education classes. Best practices for these activities include:

- Indoor sports are riskier than outdoor sports, so extra precautions should be taken for indoor practices or games and activities should be moved outside whenever possible.
- Physical education classes should be held outdoors whenever possible.
- Masks should always be worn by teachers, coaches and whenever possible by students.
- Practices may be conducted individually or in small groups and huddles or team meetings should be eliminated.
- The number of competitions may be reduced or limited to only local teams.
- The accumulation of virus-laden particles due to screaming or yelling should be reduced by educating coaches and restricting spectators.
- Activities such as theater, singing or playing a wind instrument increase particle emissions from the respiratory system and therefore increase transmission risk. Moving these activities outdoors, reducing group sizes, maintaining physical distance between students and frequent cleaning are all important risk-reduction strategies.
- Particularly risky activities may be held online or replaced with safer alternatives.
- Additional distancing and ventilation will be needed if riskier activities are to take place indoors. Masks should be worn at all times for singing, theater, string and percussive instruments and for wind instrument players except when actively playing the instrument.

What CPS Says

CPS does not yet have much written about extracurricular activities, including music groups and sports. Physical education will be conducted while practicing physical distancing, with mild to low intensity physical activity and while all involved are wearing masks. For dance, teachers will ensure each student wears a mask. Class will have at least 60 square feet of space to ensure physical distancing.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

Parents may have further questions about physical education and extracurricular at their students' schools. Some of these questions could include:

- During PE, will contact activities and sports be prohibited (ie: basketball, soccer, football etc)?
- Will masks be required during PE?
- What kind of mask break will be allowed safely should my child need one after physically exerting him/herself?
- Will it be possible for PE classes to be conducted outdoors, weather permitting?
- If my student plays an instrument or sings in the choir, will he/she they still be attending practices and lessons?
- How will music be managed to make it safer? Will we have the opportunity to choose virtual options for these activities, even if our student is attending school in-person?
- Will sports be taking place? How will student participation in sports affect pods and quarantining if necessary?

The best practices in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Harvard [T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Social/Emotional Support

To ensure a safe and healthy return to in-person schooling, social and emotional health must be addressed by the school and incorporated into the school day, especially as students grapple with so many changes around them. The pandemic and the dramatic change in routines have caused multiple traumas to many students. Plus, new rules and restrictions in the school day will present challenges to students. A unified effort from all school staff will need to be incorporated to make the return to school a positive experience and to overcome these shared traumas.

What Experts Say

Addressing mental health and trauma requires a coordinated effort across the entire school. Some of the recommendations from experts in the field include:

- High-quality social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula can be a great resource to foster relationships and teach important coping skills.
- Schools should consider implementing evidence-based trauma-specific interventions.
- Schools should establish connections with consistent community-building activities throughout the day, including morning meetings, trauma-informed professional development, open discussion of new environmental stressors and social emotional skill building.
- Schools should identify a clear and consistent process for identifying and supporting individuals in need of additional mental health support and services.
- Schools should ensure that all staff know how to connect students to mental health services.
- For schools with mental health clinicians, it is important that all school staff have a clear understanding of the process for referring students.
- Schools that lack mental health clinicians should establish relationships with community-based mental health providers and develop a system for making referrals.
- Schools may consider taking advantage of expanded access to telehealth to maintain mental health services while providing distance learning.
- It is particularly important to ensure that students and their families have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate treatment.
- Schools should also pay attention to the mental health needs of school staff. Given these added stressors, schools should offer staff resources that support their own wellness—especially related to trauma.
- Social and emotional support at the school should address both in-person and distance learning situations.

Schools should be focused on building trust with families in their districts through transparency, open communication and rigorous safety measures. This trust issue is a significant barrier to success in restoring in-person learning and requires direct attention and engagement.

It will be important for schools to acknowledge that not all communities have experienced the pandemic in the same way. Black, Latinx, Native American communities and other marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to the longstanding impacts of systemic racism in the health, education, housing, and justice sectors (among others). Many students and staff may also be dealing with the impact of nationwide protests sparked by the killing of Black people by law enforcement officials.

What CPS Says

Schools will ensure students are consistently connected to their teachers and peers while maintaining safe, physically distant interactions. Teachers will create welcoming and predictable learning environments through routines and rituals to improve academic outcomes and wellbeing for students.

Social-emotional skill development will support students to connect, heal and thrive in this time of uncertainty and

transition. Schools will increase their efforts to teach student's specific language to identify and articulate their feelings and communicate their needs.

Parents and caregivers can expect their schools to share lessons and resources to reinforce the skills being taught in the remote and in-person classroom. Additionally, parents and caregivers can participate in a Family and Community Engagement in Education (FACE2) virtual workshop.

The CPS Crisis Team will be available to support school communities in the event of severe sickness or death. This support includes collaborating with the school staff to develop school support plans and ensure clinical and emotional support for the school community.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has incorporated some considerations for a trauma-informed return to school, with resources available for staff, students and families to take advantage of. Your role as a parent or caregiver will be to continue to utilize these resources and to ensure the school is staying vigilant in providing the necessary social and emotional support for your child. Some questions to consider include:

- Will the school provide morning meetings or regular virtual meetings to discuss and explain new rules in a positive manner?
- Will CPS be providing social and emotional support to teachers and staff?
- Who is the point of contact for my family for additional emotional and social support needs?
- How will schools work to foster an environment that does not ostracize students and staff for a COVID-19 diagnosis?

The best practices included in "Social/Emotional Support" are based on recommendations from: Kaiser Permanente Report ["Planning for the Next Normal at School,"](#) [Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network](#), [Referral Pathway Protocol for Mental Health Supporters](#) and [Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Youth Mental Health](#).

About Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to making schools healthier places for all students. HSC believes that health and wellness should be incorporated into every aspect of the school experience. Founded in 2002, HSC advocates for children to have better access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources and clean air to shape their lifelong learning and health. HSC facilitates collaboration between students, parents, teachers, administrators and policymakers to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change for healthier schools at the school, district, state and national levels. For more information, visit healthyschoolscampaign.org.

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