

Questions to Ask About Your School's In-Person Learning Plan

We looked at best practices from public health officials as compared with written policy from Chicago Public Schools regarding reopening school during the COVID-19 pandemic. We've prepared this list of questions for parents and caregivers who may not be sure what to look for in assessing the safety of their school.

For more details about public health guidance and how it compares with CPS school reopening policy, please [download the full report](#).

Getting to School

CPS has planned infection control strategies for school transportation that align with public health experts' best practices. Parents and caregivers should 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 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?

Symptom Screening

CPS has included policies that screen for symptoms prior to allowing entry to CPS buildings. You may want to 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. Will I be contacted if someone who is on my child's school bus contracts COVID-19?

- How will the school avoid crowding at arrival as symptoms are checked and temperatures taken for each student?
- Who will be responsible for temperature checks on arrival and ensuring symptom checks are complete?

- Where is the space for quarantining students with symptoms 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?

Action When Someone Gets Sick

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?
- 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?

Mask Wearing

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?

Hygiene

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 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?

Physical Distancing

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 with 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?

Air Circulation

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 more information on the mechanical ventilation system being used in the school building?
- Are you using MERV13 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?

Cleaning

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?

School Meals

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?

Recess + Outdoor Play

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?

Bathroom Protocol

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 the building be providing additional ventilation in bathrooms?
- Will students be allowed hall passes to go to the bathroom?

Physical Education + Extracurricular Activities

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 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?

Social/Emotional Support

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?