June 25, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

I am already amazed and encouraged by your leadership and engagement following the release of the joint guidance for resuming in-person learning this fall -- like [Deerfield District 109](https://twitter.com/DPS109/status/1275969776272257024), which held a virtual community update for more than 500 people last night where they asked and answered more than 200 questions about school reopening. As Berwyn South School District 100 Principal [Mariana Nicasio](https://twitter.com/mariana_nicasio/status/1275860384168239105) said, “Patience, grace, care, and collaboration are going to be key characteristics of all stakeholders. #BetterTogether has to be our mindset.”

Thank you for joining ISBE’s webinars for administrators. Your thoughtful questions have affirmed how deeply you all are engaged in detailed preparations to bring students back to school safely. You can view recordings of the webinars on our COVID-19 website at [www.ISBE.net/COVID19](http://www.ISBE.net/COVID19). We have developed a school reopening FAQ based on your questions that we will continue to update. View the FAQ at [www.isbe.net/Documents/FAQ-Part-3-Transition-Guidance.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/Documents/FAQ-Part-3-Transition-Guidance.pdf).

ISBE remains committed to supporting you and engaging in an open dialogue, as you focus on implementing the Illinois Department of Public Health requirements locally. With the help of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), ISBE is sharing the following toolkit to provide communications resources for you to customize and consider as you begin to share your local reopening plans with your communities.

CCSSO is a national organization that works with state departments of education across the country to address shared challenges. The toolkit represents some of the collective thinking from education leaders nationwide, as each of our states grapples with similar dilemmas. Common to each of our states is the goal of doing the very best we can for our students, especially the children and families we serve who have been hurt the most by the pandemic.

In the toolkit, you will find:

1. **Key messages** to communicate your district’s reopening plans.
2. **A checklist** of items to consider as you contemplate what, when, and how to communicate about the transition back into the academic year.
3. **Reminders for ways to effectively communicate and engage with parents** and how your district will keep families updated on the latest information.
4. **Social media graphics and signage** to display in school buildings and communicate public health requirements to students and families.
5. **Tough questions and anticipated issues** that districts should be prepared to answer from families, media, and other key stakeholders.
6. **A template survey** that can be administered to families and other stakeholders to inform your district’s reopening plan and meet students’ and families’ individual needs. This incorporates the survey in Appendix C of the guidance but in Word document format so you can easily customize.
7. **A sample self-certification** that schools can use for individuals to certify that they are symptom-free before entering school buildings, in lieu of the school conducting symptom and temperature checks.

Each of these resources are designed to provide important information to families so they can be part of a successful transition back. These materials are just one component of your outreach; it’s important to remember that nothing takes the place of a frequent, open line of communication with families. The good news is, according to national research, families are ready and eager to partner with schools and teachers to help their students succeed.

I appreciate the continued dedication all of you and your staff have shown throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the needs of your students, parents, and teachers. Thank you for your partnership as we work to restart and recover. We truly are better together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala

State Superintendent of Education

Illinois State Board of Education

**School and District Fall Reopening Toolkit**

**Key Messages**

During this unprecedented time, sharing updates on the state of education in your district is critical. The following key messages have been designed to help district leaders communicate policies pertaining to the reopening of schools in fall 2020. When discussing the issues, leaders should emphasize the health and safety of students and educators and that these policies will help meet the needs of all students in a fair and equitable way. Keep messages high level but concrete and avoid overly complex phrases or education jargon.

**STRUCTURE**

* School may look different this fall than what our families are accustomed to, but our focus remains the same: every student receives a high-quality education.
* Our district’s goal is to return to in-person instruction, and we will prioritize the health and safety of students, staff and their families first and foremost.
* Our district is committed to providing every student with a high-quality public education and the opportunity to succeed regardless of which platforms are used to provide educational services.
* We will be providing [IN-SCHOOL, REMOTE LEARNING OR BLENDED] education this fall.
* District leaders followed the guidance of the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education when making decisions about what the fall will look like.

**STUDENT LEARNING & WELL-BEING**

* COVID-19 has greatly impacted the lives of students, teachers and families. Our district will continue to seek ways to help students, families and educators with social and emotional supports as they address issues such as grief, stress and missing social interactions.
* It’s critically important that we meet the needs of each student, across in-person and remote learning contexts, including vulnerable students and those furthest from opportunity. [STEPS TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS]
* In order to address the digital divide that impacts too far many of our young people and their families, we have [INSERT ACTIONS].
* When students return in the fall, [DISTRICT] will be [ADD STEPS HERE] to measure where students stand academically to help them get back on track.

**SAFETY**

* The health and safety of students, families and educators are top of mind in all decisions made pertaining to the reopening of schools.

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

* Communicating with families is a top priority. We want to partner with families and will prioritize communicating with them. [DETAILS ON HOW WE ARE DOING THAT].

**Checklist**

Districts should be prepared to frequently share information about school reopening plans with families and other stakeholders. Below is a chart that shows multiple phases of communication with key stakeholders:

Parents want to receive consistent and frequent information when it comes to decisions that will impact their children, and the community wants to feel reassured that the policies being enacted are best for their kids. District communications should empower both parents and the local community to share their own opinions about their local education system and reassure them that their input is listened to and considered.

Here is a checklist of items to consider when preparing to reopen schools for the 2020 – 2021 academic year:

* **Establish a communications strategy for fall learning. What are some methods you can use?**
  + Administer a survey to educators, parents and/or students to gather their views around reopening and the role of summer learning as part of the equation.
  + Appoint a family liaison in charge of overseeing all communications with families, if one is not present already.
  + Ensure a dedicated COVID-19 email address or telephone number run by the district is functional and messages are monitored.
  + Host virtual town halls to communicate the results of the survey and work of your re-opening team.
  + Publish a press release articulating a detailed vision for school reopening (inclusive of summer and fall if possible).
  + Create and run public service announcements encouraging steps such as filling out the survey.
  + Publish opinion pieces that spell out the district’s reasoning behind its reopening plans and describe health and safety precautions being taken.
  + Conduct a media briefing to spell out the district’s reopening plans.
* **How should you work and engage with partners and key stakeholders?**
  + Co-host meetings with educator organizations, community groups and other civic-minded bodies to hear concerns and provide clarity on the district’s vision.
  + Record meetings and post to website.
  + Discuss and review parent-friendly materials.
  + Work with partners to identify communities and opportunities for deeper engagement.
* **What are strong ways to frequently communicate new information using multiple channels and platforms?**
  + Have materials reviewed by civil rights, advocacy groups and organizations that represent disability and/or historically underserved communities for tone, cultural competency and to ensure key issues are addressed.
  + Communicate via local media (earned, donated, and paid) channels including print, TV and radio.
  + Track questions that are raised and post an FAQ online with clear, detailed answers to respond to common concerns and issues.
  + Engage with stakeholders on various social media channels.
  + Utilize email + text to reach parents with key information.
  + In addition to the above channels, share information through community-based organizations such as PTAs, Boys & Girls Clubs and places of worship.

**Helpful Reminders for Engaging with Parents**

The following recommendations have been adapted from original guidance provided on engaging parents through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and are based on qualitative research conducted across 20 states and multiple national surveys. These recommendations include effective strategies for various types of engagement and are designed to help states direct and make the most of their parent outreach efforts. [Learning Heroes](https://bealearninghero.org/) has been the driving force in highlighting the critical need for evidence-based communications with parents and has funded much of this research.

* Always provide information within the following context that makes it personal for the parent/guardian: “Why is this important for my child, and how will it help him or her?”
* Information should be written in a basic and factual manner. If it is not, it may be perceived as propaganda and therefore not trustworthy. Make every effort to be as specific as possible.
* Parents want brief, clear and concise information. Examples include:
  + Actionable Checklists: Checklists that identify simple actions and resources to help parents become more informed or help their child are useful.
  + Visuals and Graphics: To increase readability, use visuals and infographics when possible. Materials should also include plenty of text features, including white space and bolding to help parents easily identify the key takeaways.
* Leverage effective communication channels.
  + Phone calls and Text: Most parents [said in a recent Learning Heroes survey](https://r50gh2ss1ic2mww8s3uvjvq1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LH_2020-Parent-Survey-Partner-1.pdf) that their favored communications vehicles were phone calls and text, although email was also popular. However, some parents still prefer to receive hard copies sent directly in the mail, including parents in low-income households.
  + Digital Channels: During a crisis, it is a good practice to use all methods possible to ensure parents get the message. In addition to phone calls, email and text, this may also include posting the information on a school/district website, using social media, and airing radio and TV PSAs.
* Be sure all communication materials – whether hard copy or electronic – are accessible to parents with disabilities and available in other languages.
* Provide updates via video and share link via text, email and social media.
* Consider creating an online form or survey to gather input from parents on the information that they are looking for and how they would like to receive it.

**Posters and Social Media Graphics**

The links provided include posters and social media graphics to help communicate state public health requirements to your communities. Sharing these resources ahead of schools reopening can help set expectations for students and families. ISBE will provide additional translations of these documents in Arabic, Polish, Urdu, Tagalog, Gujarati, Russian, Mandarin, French, and Telegu in early July.

* “What Parents Need to Know” flyer
  + [English](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-Signage-Parents-English.pdf)
  + [Spanish](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/What-Parents-Need-Know-SP.pdf)
* 8.5x11 posters to display in school buildings promoting face coverings, social distancing, capacity limits, symptom screening, handwashing, and increased sanitation
  + [English](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-School-Reopening-Poster-Letter.pdf)
  + [Spanish](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-School-Reopening-Poster-Letter-SP.pdf)
* 24x36 posters for school buildings (same as above in a larger size)
  + [English](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-School-Reopening-Poster.pdf)
  + [Spanish](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-School-Reopening-SP.pdf)
* Social media graphics
  + [English](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Phase-4-Social-Media-Graphics-English.zip)
  + [Spanish](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Social-Media-Spanish.zip)

**Tough Questions**

Below are questions your district should be prepared to answer about school reopening plans. These questions are not for distribution, but rather to prepare district officials to answer questions from stakeholders and the media.

* It seems unrealistic to expect students to wear masks or stay 6 feet apart. How are you going to address this?
* My child may have missed important subject matter content last spring. What is the plan to make up for lost material?
* Why am I having to wait so long to get school scheduling information?
* My child doesn't learn well online. How are you going to meet his/her needs if we are doing remote learning again?
* I am a working parent. How can I be sure that school will resume this fall?
* Why hasn’t the district provided computer devices to every student? [IF APPLICABLE]
* What percentage of students and teachers have access to the Internet and what is the district doing to connect the rest?
* Is it safe for my children to return to their school building?
* Why do we have to follow these precautions when there have not been many cases in our region?
* Are there enough nurses in schools?
* What is the district doing to assist students with disabilities and English learners?
* My child has anxiety about returning to school and having to wear a mask. What will the district do to support their mental health?
* What will the grading policies be next year?
* How will the district ensure that students are still learning, even though distance learning looks different across schools?
* What will happen if schools need to close again due to another coronavirus outbreak?
* What are the district’s plans for sports and clubs?
* Myself, my child, or a family member is high-risk. Can we opt for fully remote learning even if the district is providing in-person instruction?

**Contingency Plans**

Below are issues your district should be prepared to communicate about in the months ahead. The issues are not for distribution, but to prepare officials to answer questions from stakeholders and the media, if needed.

* A last-minute change to reopening plans
* Schools buildings reopen but have to be closed again for health or safety reasons
* Widespread technical issues or lack of devices or internet connectivity that affect online learning delivery
* A student, teacher, administrator or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 or there’s an outbreak in a school or community
* A significant number of students or teachers don’t return to school or fail to log-on for online learning
* Stakeholder organizations and collective bargaining units oppose school reopening plans
* A shortage of personal protective equipment complicates reopening plans
* The district faces a non-coronavirus emergency such as a weather event that provides hurdles to reopening plans

**Template Family Survey**

This sample family/student survey incorporates the survey in Appendix C of the ISBE and IDPH guidance for returning to in-person instruction in Phase 4 with some additions from CCSSO and in a Word document format so you can easily customize.

Please verify the following information so we can best communicate with you throughout the transition back to school.

1. **Student:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. **Parent/Guardian completing this survey:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. **Student’s address:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. **Parent/Guardian email address:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. **Parent/Guardian phone number:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. **How would you prefer to receive information from [DISTRICT]? Please rank on a scale of 1 to 8 with 1 being the top preference and 8 being not preferred at all:**
   * Text messages: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Phone calls: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Email: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Mail: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Brief video highlighting major updates being considered as schools reopen: \_\_\_\_\_
   * School portal: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Virtual townhall meetings: \_\_\_\_\_
   * Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. **Preferred language in which to receive school communications:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. **Emergency contacts or persons to contact in case of student illness:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please share about the impact of the pandemic on your student/family so we can best support your student when the school year starts.

1. **How would you describe the emotional wellbeing of your child(ren) as it relates to COVID-19 and school closures?**

❏ My child(ren) has adjusted fine.

❏ My child(ren) has experienced some mixed emotions but is otherwise doing OK.

❏ I am very concerned about the emotional well-being of my child(ren) because of the toll COVID-19 or related school closures have had.

1. **As you think ahead to the 2020-2021 school year, please mark your two greatest concerns as it relates to school reopening:**

❏ Exposure to COVID-19 while in school.

❏ My child(ren) is academically behind.

❏ I don’t know where my child(ren) stands academically.

❏ Access to my child(ren)’s teacher.

❏ An erratic school schedule.

❏ The quality of online learning.

❏ The emotional wellbeing of my child(ren).

❏ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **What impact has the pandemic had on the family?**

❏ Illness: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

❏ Death: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

❏ Economic: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

❏ Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Can any of the follow school staff be helpful in connecting with your student or family in advance of the start of the school year?**

❏ Nutrition Staff to Assist with Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility

❏ Nurse

❏ Homeless Coordinator

❏ Counselor or Social Worker

❏ Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please share the following information with us to help inform our school reopening plans and schedules.

1. **Does your family have access to a computer device and internet service that make online learning at home possible?**

❏ We can’t do online learning because our household lacks a computer device

❏ We can’t do online learning because our household doesn’t have reliable internet service

❏ We have a computer device and internet service but the devices are shared among family members so my child has limited access.

❏ We have access to a computer device but it’s not compatible with the district’s system.

❏ We have access to both a computer device and internet service that allows for online learning.

1. **Would your student need childcare if they were not in-person at school**? ❏ Yes ❏ No
2. **Will your student need to be employed during the school year?** ❏ Yes ❏ No
   1. **If so, what is the student’s work schedule?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. **What educational activities has the student been engaged in since school was last in session?**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **Does the family have access to reliable transportation (not school-provided) to bring the student to and from school if needed?** ❏ Yes ❏ No

Reminders:

❏ **If immunizations are due, students cannot attend unless there are immunizations on file or an appropriate exemption by [DATE]. Please schedule any required immunizations or physicals.**

❏ **Please have your student return any school district property, such as a tablet or laptop, on the first day of school.**

*Adapted from Missouri School Boards' Association’s Center for Education Safety sample survey form developed by the School-Based Health Alliance of Missouri.*

**Sample Symptom Self-Certification**

IDPH requires that schools conduct symptom screenings and temperature checks **or** require that

individuals self-certify that they are free of symptoms before entering school buildings. If schools and districts opt to use self-certification, they may determine the method of symptom self-certification that best fits their local context. Options include hard copy forms or web applications that may be completed on digital devices by students, staff, and other visitors each day that they will attend school in person. Below is a sample self-certification form that can serve as a model for schools and districts to use.

Full name of individual wishing to enter the building: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Questions:

1. Have you received a confirmed diagnosis for coronavirus (COVID-19) by a coronavirus (COVID-19) test or from a diagnosis by a health care professional in the past 14 days?
2. Have you had close contact with or cared for someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days?
3. Have you experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days (to include: fever or temperature of greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit/38 degrees Celsius, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, pressure in the chest, extreme fatigue, earache, persistent headache, diarrhea, and persistent loss of smell or taste)?

How do you respond to these questions? (If you are able to answer "YES" to one or more of the above questions, select YES. If you are able to answer "NO" to all the questions, select NO.)

☐ NO to all questions ☐ YES to any one (or more) of the questions

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If NO is selected: Based on your answers, you are ALLOWED TO ENTER THE BUILDING.

If YES is selected: Based on your answers, you are NOT TO ENTER THE BUILDING.