

Corbin Independent Schools Re-Opening Guidelines for 2020-2021

Please allow me to thank everyone who had a part in helping our students through a very difficult time. Parents, grandparents, teachers and friends supported our students while we worked our way through Non-Traditional Instruction for almost three months. It is our goal to return safely as many students as possible to in-person school settings this fall. This allows us to maximize learning and address our students' holistic needs. While we will plan for all possibilities, we intend to begin school on August 26, 2020 with all students, every day. This document will outline the protocols we are putting in place in order to do so safely. Our number one priority will continue to be the safety of our students.

As we all know, **there is no substitute for the attention and engagement that is only possible with in-person learning.** We can mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19 for in-person school programs and prevent the significant consequences of keeping students out of school and isolated. It will take all of us working together to make this successful.

The fall reopening guidance comes from a place of deep care and concern, with a focus on translating the public health data and evidence into practical application for school settings. We also know there will be many questions as we go through this process together.

This document will outline initial opening guidance for our schools within the CISD (Corbin Independent Schools) in the fall. In this guidance, we:

- Clearly state our goal of returning as many students as possible to in-person school settings.
- Provide a clear set of health and safety requirements for in-person learning this fall utilizing the most recent and up-to-date scientific data and advice from expert medical advisors.
- Disclose our learning models for this fall: in-person instruction whenever possible, hybrid and remote learning opportunities should the circumstances warrant.

Developing this initial fall memo required us to draw on the perspectives of both the educational and medical communities. Our process has included a close review of guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), Kentucky Healthy at School guidelines, Kentucky Education Continuation Task Force, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Kentucky Department of Public Health, Team Kentucky Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools ("Team KY Guide"), Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the MA COVID-19 Command Center's Medical Advisory Board.

Based on current data and research, the medical community supports the return of our students to in-person learning, with appropriate health and safety guardrails in place. **With adherence to a comprehensive set of critical health and safety requirements, we can bring our students, staff, and families safely back to school.**

Most of us are now quite familiar with the critical health and safety practices that reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. These include rigorous hygiene and handwashing, use of masks/face coverings, physical distancing, reducing interaction between groups, staying home when sick, protecting those most vulnerable to the disease, and expanding testing and tracing capabilities, among others.

Establishing a culture of health and safety in our schools that focuses on regularly enforcing these important practices is more important than any one measure individually. It is going to take all of us to keep our students safe.

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Contextual factors:

We recognize that several critical factors affect our ability to bring students back to in-person school settings this fall including the following:

Cold/flu season. Flu season is a critical factor that could pose significant challenges for schools and students. Not only do flu symptoms closely mirror COVID-19 symptoms, but managing both a bad flu season and ongoing presence of COVID-19 could be highly disruptive for our educational institutions and healthcare system. It is essential that the educational and public health communities, as well as cities and towns, work closely together to ensure as many children and adults as possible receive flu vaccines this fall.

Trajectory of COVID-19. All guidance in this document is based on the best information we have as of early July. We will carefully monitor the data in the coming weeks and months. Schools must be prepared to be flexible and ready to pivot if circumstances change significantly. For this reason, schools must plan not only for in-person learning, but also hybrid learning models (in which students learn in-person for some of the time and remotely for some of the time), and full remote learning. Remote learning may be a necessary option in the fall for some students who are unable to return to school due to underlying medical conditions and potentially for all students if COVID-19 forces widespread school closures in the future.

We recognize that planning for reopening in this “new normal” will not be easy; we also know that planning is not nearly as important – nor as difficult – as execution. To have a successful school year, we will all have to be problem-solvers, flexible and responsive to data, and willing to course-correct as necessary. It is also important to acknowledge that there will be COVID-19 positive cases in schools, and we will have protocols to help you determine the appropriate next steps when this happens to keep the school community safe.

Recognizing the special role of families:

Families, in consultation with their medical providers, will ultimately make the decision as to whether their children will attend in-person instruction, or whether their children will continue with remote learning. Schools should engage regularly and substantively with families in their primary language to ensure that they have accurate and up-to-date information to make informed decisions about whether an in-person return is best for their children. **This also means that all schools will need to have a remote learning program in place at the start of school year for students who are unable to return to in-person school.**

Families also play a critical role in supporting the new culture of health and safety that each school must establish. Most importantly, families can help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in their school communities by checking their children daily for any COVID-19 symptoms and keeping them home from school if they are sick or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. Families can also contribute by supporting the use of masks in school and on the bus, arranging alternate transportation whenever possible, communicating with teachers, school leaders and local authorities, and continuing to follow state guidance on health and safety outside of school.

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At this time, these are general health and safety practices that will enable the safe reopening of our schools for in-person learning this fall. These requirements will be modified as needed during the summer and into the fall. More detailed safety requirements will be provided for each school in the future.

As general background, COVID-19 spreads when people are in relatively close proximity, through respiratory droplets generated through coughing, sneezing, or talking to an infected person. Among the most effective preventive measures – when used consistently and in combination – are masks/face coverings, physical distancing, handwashing, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces.

Masks/face coverings:

As the primary route of transmission for COVID-19 is respiratory, masks or face coverings are among the most critical components of risk reduction. At this time, our initial requirements and related guidance are as follows:

- **Students first grade and above are required to wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth when social distancing of 6 feet isn't possible.** Face shields may be an option for those students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks/face coverings.
- **Adults, including educators and staff, are required to wear masks/face coverings.**
- **Exceptions to mask/face covering requirements** must be made for those for whom it is not possible due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health or safety factors.
- **Mask breaks should occur throughout the day.** Breaks should occur when students can be six feet apart and ideally outside or at least with the windows open. .
- **Masks/face coverings are required to be worn by everyone on the bus during school bus transportation.**

Physical distancing: Physical distancing is another important practice that helps mitigate transmission of the virus. *While the CDC has recommended maintaining a physical distance of six feet between individuals, the WHO's guidance states approximately three feet. There is no precise threshold for safety; indeed, studies suggest that physical distancing of three feet or more leads to reduced transmission, with additional distance providing additional protection.*

Schools should strive to maintain six feet of distance between individuals where physically feasible. **When six feet distance is not possible due to physical space restrictions, a minimum physical distance of three feet should be maintained and combined with the other measures outlined in this list of safety requirements.**

Other Considerations:

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Classroom and facility configuration: To the extent possible, aim for desks to be spaced six feet apart (but no fewer than three feet apart) and facing the same direction. Again, schools should seek to maximize physical distance between desks within their physical and operational constraints.

- Alternative spaces in the school (e.g., cafeteria, library, and auditorium) should be repurposed to increase the amount of available space to accommodate the maximum distance possible.

Student groups: To minimize the number of students who would potentially be exposed in the event of a COVID-19 event, to the extent feasible, elementary schools should aim to keep students in the same group throughout the day and middle and high schools are encouraged to minimize mixing student groups to the extent feasible. Our initial requirements and related guidance are as follows:

- **Cohorts:** Schools should divide students into small groups that remain with each other throughout the day, with smaller cohort sizes preferred. Schools should look for ways to isolate cohorts of students and prevent inter-group contact to the extent feasible.
- **Capacity:** There are no required maximums on cohort or group sizes, so long as schools adhere to the physical distancing requirements above and positive health metrics hold.

Screening upon entry: Checking for symptoms each morning by families and caregivers is critical and will serve as the primary screening mechanism for COVID-19 symptoms. Schools should provide information to families in their primary language to support them in conducting this symptom check and families should not send their children to school if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms.

- Students will have temperature checked upon entry into school. Staff member will use a touchless thermometer. Staff member will be taught and practice proper hygiene; thermometers will be cleaned per manufacturer's instructions.

Hand hygiene: Handwashing and hand sanitizing: Handwashing removes pathogens from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol) may be utilized when handwashing is not available. Our initial requirements and related guidance are as follows:

- Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene (handwashing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school, before eating, before putting on and taking off masks, and before dismissal.
- **Handwashing:** When handwashing, individuals should use soap and water to wash all surfaces of their hands for at least 20 seconds, wait for visible lather, rinse thoroughly, and dry.
- **Hand sanitizing:** If handwashing is not feasible, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol content can be used.

COVID-19 related isolation space: To minimize transmission of COVID-19, schools must ensure they have an isolated space available for students displaying COVID-19 symptoms. Our initial requirements and related guidance are as follows:

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- Schools are required to designate a COVID-19 related isolation space that is separate from the nurse's office or other space where routine medical care is provided. A student who shows COVID-19 symptoms during the school day should be moved to the specific room pre-designated for medical-related isolation until they can be picked up by a family member.

Vaccines: Schools should work with parents to ensure that students are current on all standard vaccinations before they return to in-person school. In addition, health providers strongly recommend all students and staff get their regular flu vaccine. Whereas for COVID-19 it appears children are less likely to be infected with and to transmit COVID-19, this is not the case for influenza, where children are frequent transmitters. Therefore, ensuring all students, teachers, and staff receive the seasonal flu vaccine is an extremely high priority.

CISD fall reopening plans:

CISD has developed a fall reopening plan that allows and/or combines:

- 1) in-person learning with new safety requirements;
- 2) a hybrid of in-person and remote learning; and
- 3) remote learning.

Before setting forth each of these plans, we emphasize that our *goal for the fall is to **safely** bring back as many students as possible to in-person school settings, to maximize learning and address our students' holistic needs. While our schools are planning a fall return that includes multiple possibilities, **our focus first and foremost is getting our students back into school buildings safely.***

There is a clear consensus from both education and medical groups: we must keep in mind not only the risks associated with COVID-19 for in-person school programs, but also the known challenges and consequences of keeping students out of school. While remote learning has improved over the course of the school closures, **there is no substitute for in-person instruction when it comes to the quality of students' academic learning.** In-person school plays an equally important role in our ability to support students' social-emotional needs, including their mental and physical health, and in mitigating the impacts of trauma. We also recognize how disruptive school closures have been to families trying to maintain regular work schedules and manage household needs, including childcare, while also facilitating remote learning.

1. **In-person learning with new safety requirements:** For the fall, our goal to get as many students as possible back into schools for in-person learning—safely. Our desire is that all students return in person to school settings that are appropriately modified to accommodate the health and safety requirements

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outlined above. Teachers will be teaching, live streaming and recording their classes, while trying to maintain a return to the normal school setting for learning and teaching as much as possible.

2 & 3. ***Hybrid learning and remote learning:*** We recognize that some families may not be comfortable for their student to return to school for in-person learning during COVID-19 and that some students may have to miss school for various other reasons. Therefore, we have created the ability for students to learn remotely by connecting virtually and watching and participating in their regular classes streaming live or watching a recorded/archived version of the class/lesson.

This hybrid and remote learning model means that students will have the opportunity to learn remotely by participating in the same classes and lessons they would have if they were in person at school, allowing students when necessary to switch between in-person and remote learning without changing their class schedules, assignments or lesson plans (at the discretion of the principal). Likewise, for individual students who cannot yet return in-person and for all students in the event of future classroom or school closures, these students will have the opportunity to learn remotely by participating in the same classes and lessons they would have if they were in person at school.