FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 [Handbook Volume 1](): Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools

To reopen safely during the COVID-19 pandemic and maximize the amount of in-person instruction, schools need sufficient resources as well as adhered-to, strong state and local public health measures. Extraordinary efforts by states, districts, and schools have been underway to support students throughout the pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) are providing recommendations and considerations based on the most recent scientific evidence to support school and district leaders and educators in meeting these ever evolving, significant challenges.

Consistent implementation of mitigation strategies during all school-related activities is critical for reopening schools – and keeping them open. To that end, ED is releasing the [COVID-19 Handbook,]() which provides strategies to do this and also identifies ways to promote equity for communities of color and people with disabilities/chronic conditions who have borne a disproportionate burden of illness and serious outcomes from COVID-19. The [ED COVID-19 Handbook]() will support the education community with implementation guidance, strategies, and considerations to help reopen schools safely. The handbook is being released in two volumes.

First Volume of the ED COVID-19 Handbook
The first volume supplements [CDC's Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](). ED's handbook provides practical examples and roadmaps to provide educators and staff with the tools they need to implement CDC's recommended safe practices for in-person learning. Highlights include:

Masking Practices
The handbook provides applicable strategies to promote universal and correct use of masks in schools by utilizing signage and school announcements to remind students and staff how to use masks. The handbook guides educators through working with students with disabilities who cannot wear a mask or safely wear a mask, consistent with CDC guidelines.

Physical Distancing Practices
The ED handbook details a variety of practical ways that educators and schools can practice physical distancing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including
- Grouping students into a pod that stays together all day with their core teacher (and any aide or student teacher who is present), including for lunch and recess.
- Using cafeterias and auditoriums for classes.
- Staggering the use of communal spaces and reconfiguring bell schedules to minimize foot traffic.
- For transportation to school, seating one student per row and assigning each bus rider to a designated seat that is the same every day.

Roadmap for Stakeholder Engagement
A successful school reopening strategy requires engaging the entire school community to promote actions that will lead to a safe learning environment for all educators, staff, and students. ED's handbook lays out a roadmap for who should be at the table and suggests ways that school leaders and

educators can conduct individual outreach activities and use surveys and virtual town halls to engage the community in an effort to reopen schools.

Second Volume of the ED COVID-19 Handbook
The second volume of the ED COVID-19 Handbook, which will be released in the coming weeks, will provide specific strategies to address the extraordinary disruption created by COVID-19 for students, educators, and parents — especially for historically underserved students and communities that preliminary data suggest have been hit hardest by the pandemic. These strategies will be tailored around the following topics:
1. Meeting the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students.
2. Supporting educator and school staff well-being.
3. Addressing lost instructional time for students.
4. Stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce.
5. Ensuring equitable access to broadband and the devices needed to participate in remote learning.
6. Supporting the effective use of technology for in-person learning and periodic shifts to remote learning.
7. Providing school nutrition, regardless of the educational setting.
8. Providing all students with access to a safe and inclusive learning environment
9. Extending learning time.
10. Addressing resource inequities to provide all students with the educational opportunities they need to succeed, including access to a well-rounded education (including advanced courses, music, and the arts), quality educators, and integrated student support services.
11. Using data to inform students, parents, and educators of progress and areas requiring additional support.

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