



COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools

Updated: Sept. 2, 2020

Welcoming Students for Orientation and Targeted Services

As schools and districts prepare to welcome students back to school in a fully virtual environment, it may be necessary for schools to bring small groups of students into the building for short orientation periods or to provide targeted services. This document provides guidance to ensure efficient and safe experiences for students, staff and families.

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Universal Expectations

As recommended by Gov. Andy Beshear, schools should prioritize virtual learning experiences for all students. Under certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to bring small groups of students into the building when districts are closed to in-person classes. Any time that a school is providing in-person services to students, the school must consider how to maintain the health and



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safety expectations outlined in the [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#) document last updated on Aug. 31, 2020. This includes the five expectations for health and safety at school:

1. Social distancing
2. Cloth face coverings
3. Screening and school exclusion
4. Sanitation and environmental factors
5. Contact tracing

In addition to these expectations, schools should not exceed a total school capacity of 15 percent of their usual student building capacity AND should have no more than 15 individuals in a classroom at any given time, including adults. Similar to other industries, schools must meet the five aforementioned expectations even when operating at a reduced capacity.

Pre-planning for a Successful Event

Before planning any in-person activities, schools should carefully consider the need and scope of the experience. Traditional orientation events and classroom activities are not in alignment with current health and safety best practices.

First, schools should consider whether or not all students need to attend an in-person session and prioritize their planning around that need. For example, students in transitional grades, such as incoming freshman, may have a greater need for an in-person orientation than students in continuing grades, such as a high school junior who already is familiar with the school. Similarly, students enrolled in career and technical education pathways may have a greater need for orientation and safety training within their respective CTE classrooms and facilities.

Having determined the needs of the community, the school should next set the scope of their in-person activities. To establish scope of in-person activities, schools may want to consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the activity and could it be conducted remotely?
- What tasks do we need individual participants to complete? Can they be completed online? Have we tried it online before?
- What materials will be distributed/collected? How will we ensure that those materials are kept safe and sanitized? Is the distribution/collection of the materials necessary?
- Which aspects of an in-person activity are absolutely necessary? Can we move a portion of the activity to a virtual environment to shorten the duration of in-person contact?

Schools should think creatively about how to structure in-person activities in such a way as to successfully achieve their desired outcomes while maintaining proper health protocols. For



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example, if your school orientation normally includes a pep rally to introduce students to various cultural elements of your building, consider transitioning that activity into a fun video featuring a variety of staff. A video such as this would allow the school to continue to teach its carefully crafted cultural elements and expand its sense of community without sacrificing the health and safety of individuals.

Models for Efficient and Safe Orientations

Orientations and back-to-school events are important elements that help prepare students for a successful school experience. As schools begin to plan for efficient and safe orientation activities, the Kentucky Department of Education encourages schools to consider some of the following alternative orientation delivery methods:

Outdoor Orientation

If weather permits, schools may consider hosting their orientation activities outdoors. These events could be drive-thru or walk-thru and feature stations around the building, allowing students and their families to safely collect materials, complete paperwork and meet their new teacher. While outdoor events are safer than indoor activities, schools still should seek to maintain proper social distancing and enforce mask requirements throughout the event.

Rotating Stations

If an indoor event is preferred, schools should consider designing their orientation using a rotational format. Have students arrive to the school at pre-determined intervals. Start in large spaces, such as gyms and cafeterias, to pick-up materials before allowing students to visit with their teacher in the classroom in small groups. It is important to keep students moving through the building and limit the amount of time that any one family spends in a single area. It also is important to provide markers for social distancing when queuing at pick-up locations. During classroom interactions, schools should stack chairs to prevent sitting and lingering and mark designated spaces for families to stand within the classroom. Between groups, common spaces must be sanitized. The use of a mask is always required when students and families are in the building.

By Appointment Only

Depending on your situation, it may be appropriate to allow only those students who want to meet their teacher in person to do so. This can be done through setting appointments. Necessary materials and paperwork can be mailed to families or picked up through a scheduled drive-thru protocol. Students who are new to a building or who have special education needs should be given priority if appointment slots become limited.

Virtual Orientation

Create a tab on the school's website to house a virtual orientation. Allow teachers to make brief introduction videos. Include videos from other areas, such as the special area teachers, the school



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nurse or cafeteria manager. Virtual orientations also can include videos explaining how to activate and log on to school-owned devices or virtual building tours so students will be more prepared to enter the building later during the school year.

Considerations for Targeted Services

Schools may, at their own discretion, bring small groups of students into the building to receive targeted services that supplement learning. These targeted services could include activities such as:

- Evaluation,
- Necessary hands on experiences (career and technical education),
- Mental health or academic counseling,
- Occupational, physical or speech therapy, or
- Targeted remediation or tutoring.

When coordinating targeted services, schools must maintain the expectations outlined in the [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#) document, including social distancing, temperature checks, and mask requirements.

To protect the health and safety of those involved, targeted services should be time-bound with most experiences lasting less than two hours. Schools should stagger the start and end time of targeted services to limit the number of students in entryways and hallways at any given period of time. To facilitate this staggering, a central calendar and schedule should be maintained to ensure that no two activities begin at the same time.

Targeted services must be supplemental to the regular instruction received by all students during periods of remote learning. These services must be made available to all students, but schools may choose to prioritize services for vulnerable groups. Additionally, schools seeking to provide targeted services to students must ensure that students not participating in the services have access to a teacher while the services are being provided.

Below are some vignettes to demonstrate the role of targeted services during periods of virtual learning:

- A welding teacher has developed a curriculum to be deployed in the virtual environment. This curriculum includes topics such as safety, welding processes and theoretical information about the types of joining processes used in various situations. To supplement the virtual experience, the teacher offers a one-hour, hands-on welding experience to students. All students have access to this experience and if a student chooses not to participate, they will have an opportunity to learn the hands-on skill later when schools reopen. Students must pre-register to participate in the hands-on experience



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and the group is capped at eight students. All students leave the building immediately once the experience is complete and the welding teacher, with support from custodial staff, sanitizes the lab to prepare for future experiences.

- Kentucky Elementary School has 40 students who have demonstrated dramatic learning loss in the first few days of virtual learning. The school offers an intensive remediation program to these students. Students have access to small group remedial instruction for 90 minutes every other day. Students are assigned to groups and may not transfer from one group to another. No more than five students participate in each remedial instruction group. The school designates a single teacher to manage the remediation rotations so that students who do not participate in the program still have ready access to a teacher during the day. In between sessions, the teacher and custodial team work together to sanitize all surfaces following guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Parents have the opportunity to enroll their children in the remediation program, but only after the 40 prioritized students have been given the opportunity to enroll.
- Two students enrolled in an AP Physics course express frustration with their ability to master the calculations for position, velocity and acceleration. The teacher decides to offer in-person assistance to students on Wednesdays. This assistance is provided by appointment only in a one-on-one setting. The teacher schedules 30-minute time slots, allowing sufficient time between appointments for students to exit the building and for classroom surfaces to be sanitized. The teacher prioritizes students who already have experienced an individual virtual tutoring session. While the teacher is working with a student in person, an instructional assistant is monitoring the online platform for questions that may need the teacher's immediate attention after the tutoring session.

Considerations for Special Populations

Depending on your situation, it may be necessary to meet with families of students with special learning needs including English learners and students identified for Gifted and Talented or Special Education services. During your orientation, you should follow the guidance outlined in the [COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools – Exceptional Learners and Preschool Students](#) document.

Throughout orientation events, schools should consider ways to demark social distancing requirements including visual reminders, gestures to prompt when social distancing is necessary, and verbal or auditory cues for students with visual impairments. Schools also may consider the use of clear face masks, or face shields in lieu of cloth face coverings, when communicating with students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.



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Students and families who require additional assistance preparing for the new year may be given opportunities to visit the school for private orientation meetings on a separate schedule from other students.

Schools may need to conduct assessments for eligibility and identification of students with suspected disabilities. Assessments should be conducted virtually when possible. However, in some cases, assessments may need to be conducted in person. When in-person assessments are required, schools should schedule a time to meet with the student at the school and must follow the expectations found in the [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#). In addition, consider the following strategies when conducting in-person assessments with students:

- Test booklets should sit out for at least 24 hours between uses. If possible, lay them out individually rather than in a stack.
- Sanitize any hard surfaces students will touch such as tables, chairs and pencils. This must be done between testing sessions.
- If using keyboards, wipe down keyboards before and after using. Be careful with screens because some sanitizing agents can ruin screens and monitors.
- Students and staff should wash hands before and after testing.

Considerations for Transportation Services

In communities without public transportation, districts may consider running regular routes to help families access in-person activities and receive necessary materials to participate in virtual instruction. Districts are encouraged to follow the established guidance found in the [COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools – Pupil Transportation](#) document.

Pitfalls to Avoid

It is important that in-person events are designed for maximum efficiency and safety. As such, there are a few potential pitfalls to avoid when planning your event.

Avoid Providing Primary Instruction

Students should not be brought into the building to receive primary instruction during periods of fully virtual learning. While it may be appropriate to offer brief training lessons on tasks necessary for completing virtual learning, such as logging into a learning management system or accessing course content online, these brief episodes should not be focused on delivering new content. All targeted services must supplement the primary instruction being received online and students should not be excused from online course work based on their participation in targeted services.



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However, if the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) has determined a student's offer of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) includes in-person instruction for special education and related services, then the services should be delivered as written in the student's Individual Education Program (IEP). If the IEP calls for in-person instruction for certain special education and related services but the threat to public health is too great, then the ARC should plan for the delivery of compensatory education services as a remedy for failing to provide FAPE once in-person classes resume.

Avoid Providing Child Care Services

Schools should avoid providing child care services to students during the day. In-person activities should be designed to be brief encounters after which the child leaves the building and workstations are sanitized.

Avoid Allowing Large Crowds

Schools should seek to limit the number of people in the building at any given time. It is the expectation that schools limit building capacity to 15 percent of their usual occupancy AND no more than 15 individuals in a classroom at a time. To accomplish this, schools may consider staffing in-person activities on a rotation, limiting the number of adults allowed to attend orientation sessions with each child, scheduling windows of participation by grade level and taking appointments.

Avoid Providing Access to Playgrounds or Social Spaces

Access to all social spaces, such as playgrounds, communal gathering spaces and football stadiums, should be restricted during in-person activities. These activities should be structured to move groups swiftly through the building and avoid lingering.

Avoid Hosting Assemblies

In-person activities during the 2020-2021 school year should not include assemblies. In lieu of assemblies, schools can create welcome videos or engage in distance team-building activities during orientations, such as contributing to a mural or signing a banner featuring the school's motto or pledge.

Avoid Providing Welcome Tokens

Schools should restrict the number of unnecessary items distributed to students during in-person activities. If treat bags, t-shirts and other spirit items are distributed, they should be individually packaged and distributed as groups exit the building. This limits opportunities for students to exchange items during the session. Schools should be sure to place the pickup location in a well-ventilated space that allows for proper social distancing.



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Avoid Providing Food/Meals

Schools should not provide meals for families during in-person activities outside of those regularly scheduled by food service. Schools should refrain from offering snacks to orientation participants. Food offered as part of regular food service at the same time as an in-person activity should be provided on a to-go basis only and participants should not be allowed to eat on school property.