

GOVERNOR'S PLAN
FOR REOPENING SAFE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR

MONTANA



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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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Dear Education Community:

Over the past several months, Montanans have demonstrated incredible resolve in adapting to numerous changes in their everyday life. While these changes have proven challenging, one of the most disruptive has been the impacts on our students. Our public schools are the foundation in which the future leaders of Montana are made.

We are acutely aware of the role played by in-person teaching, not only in the students' lives, but also in the lives of the entire family. Public education has shaped who we are today, and we want to make certain that our children have the same experience. This is why we have made the safe reopening of our public schools a top priority. School administrators and teachers have been working tirelessly to not only ensure that the students are currently receiving the highest possible standard of education, but also to formulate plans to safely resume classes in the fall. Noting the uniqueness of every school district in Montana, our goal for this document is not to be prescriptive, but to provide effective, flexible guidelines to all schools in hopes that we can safely resume in person instruction in the fall.

In order to achieve this, our office met with a group of professionals, from teachers to administrators to union representatives, for several weeks to gain insight and input from those with firsthand knowledge of the struggles schools have had and expect to have throughout this crisis. Those meetings have led to the creation of this document: The Governor's Plan for Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the creation of this document for their hard work, and all the citizens of Montana for their flexibility and grit in this difficult time.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Steve Bullock.

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor

A blue ink signature of Mike Cooney.

MIKE COONEY
Lieutenant Governor

Abstract.



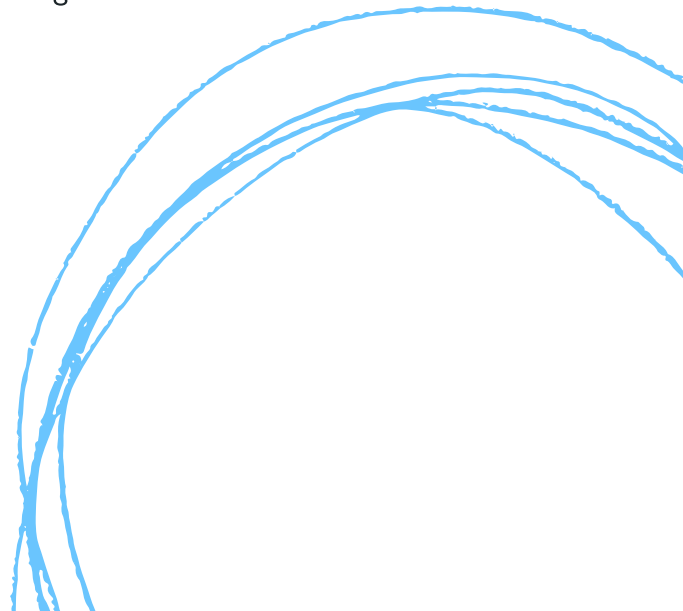
When evaluating the efficacy and priority of opening in-person instruction for students, it is vital to remember the important role schools play in the lives of students. For many of these children, school is the best place to be for a variety of reasons. In a time of endless unknowns and constant flux, school can provide structure and familiarity. The constant barrage of unknowns and bad news can cause great anxiety, but school can serve as an effective grounding tool and distraction from the many unknowns in our current world.

Many families rely on schools to supply various services, such as school meals, counseling, and childcare. Additionally, while students are not in their normal classroom settings, teachers and school employees no longer have close contact with students who may be at risk for child abuse. Numerous studies have also shown the importance of socialization and social connections, especially in the developmental years, connections that schools provide daily. COVID-19 has also exacerbated already existent inequalities inherent in our system, inequalities that public schools, often heralded as “the great equalizer” can help combat through equal opportunity educating. While health and safety are the first priority, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the importance of in-person instruction in the process of safely re-opening schools.

Health & Safety Plan.



Recognizing that Covid-19 has impacted different areas of our state in different ways, that each school district in Montana is unique, and that all reopening plans for the upcoming year should reflect local needs, each school district should create a Health and Safety Plan which serves as the local guidelines for all school reopening activities. The Health and Safety Plan should be created in consultation with local health officials, while also keeping in mind discussions with collective bargaining units.



Phased Reopening Plan.

Reopening for school districts has been categorized into three phases that align with Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III of the Governor's Reopening the Big Sky Plan. The below phases are in place to guide and clarify which steps each school district should take based on which phase the state is in.

These designations provide guidance as to how school districts can operate in each of the different phases:

- Phase I lifts the stay at home order to allow for gradual re-opening while minimizing the spread of COVID-19 through strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Schools may re-open for in-person instruction depending upon the circumstances of their community. For those students unable to attend in-person, school districts should continue to provide a manner of remote learning, school meals (where applicable), services for students with disabilities, and any other services customarily provided in a school setting.
- As the state moves into Phase II, school districts will open and to continue to adhere to strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Limitations around large social gatherings remain in place.
- Phase III eases most restrictions, but still encourages social distancing and limitations on large social gatherings to allow the economy to strategically reopen while continuing to prioritize public health. While this phase will facilitate a return to a "new normal" for schools and communities, it will be equally important to continue to monitor public health indicators and adjust strategies to mitigate community spread.



Phase One.

- ✓ Schools may re-open for in-person instruction.
- ✓ Each school district should have a plan for students who are unable to attend in-person that addresses: a manner of remote learning, access to school meals (where applicable), services to students with disabilities, and any other services customarily provided in a school setting.
- ✓ School districts that re-open should operate under a Health and Safety Plan developed in coordination with local public health officials.

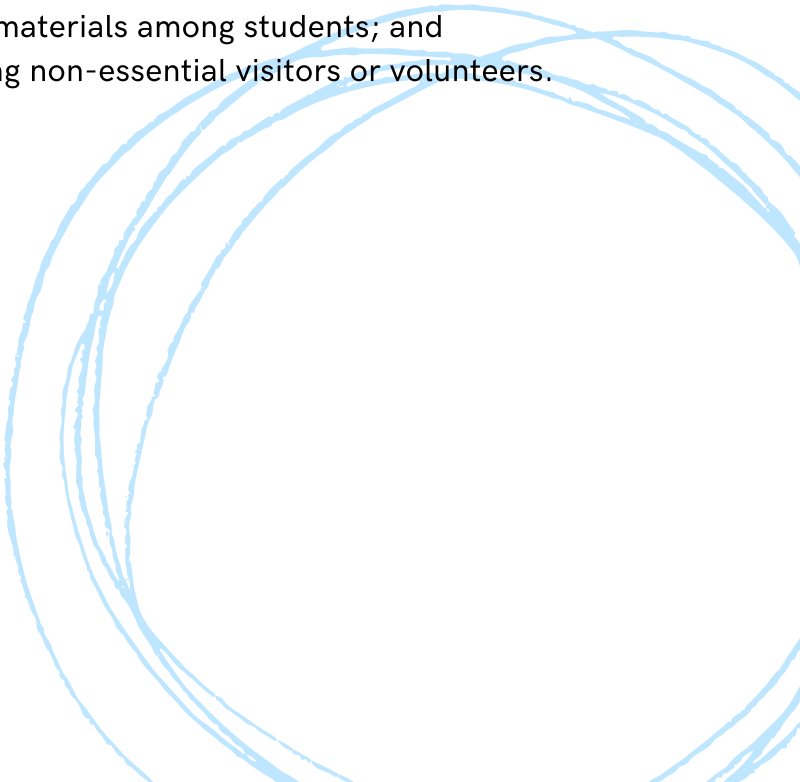


The plan should consider the following:

- Identification of a pandemic coordinator and pandemic team in each school district;
- Accommodations for students who will engage in remote learning;
- Preparations to meet the applicable requirements under Section 504 and IDEA for students on issues related to remote learning;
- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group or for those caring for someone in an at-risk group;
- Occupancy limits that follow local and state guidelines on classroom size and that allows for social distancing;
- Rules for traffic flow and congregational spaces (bathrooms, concession areas, hallways, etc.);

- Procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting spaces, surfaces, and any areas used by students and staff;
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure;
- Guidelines on the use of masks by all staff and/or students;
- Guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a history of exposure;
- Guidelines for when a quarantined staff, student, or visitor may return to school;
- Expectations for the posting of signs in highly visible locations that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs;
- Procedures to offer mental health services and counseling for students and staff;
- Protocols for sporting activities consistent with the CDC Considerations for Youth Sports;
- Procedures for restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings, and serving meals in alternate settings such as classrooms;
- Protocols for adjusting transportation schedules and practices to create social distancing between students;
- Schedules for training faculty and staff on the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan; and
- Systems for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the Health and Safety Plan.

The plan may consider the following:

- Methods of limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces;
 - Methods of staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways and ensuring regular cleaning;
 - Procedures for limiting the sharing of materials among students; and
 - Processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors or volunteers.
- 

Phase Two.

- ✓ School districts will provide in-person instruction after developing a Health and Safety Plan, developed in coordination with local health officials.
- ✓ The district's Phase II Health and Safety Plan should follow the same criteria set forth for Phase I.



Phase Three.

- ✓ School districts will provide in-person instruction after developing a Health and Safety Plan, developed in coordination with local health officials.



The plan should consider the following:

- Identification of a pandemic coordinator and pandemic team in each school district;
- Accommodations for students, teachers, and staff in an at-risk group or for those caring for someone in an at-risk group;
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms and history of exposure;
- Guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a history of exposure;
- Guidelines for when a quarantined staff, student, or visitor may return to school;
- Expectations for the posting of signs in highly visible locations, that promote everyday protective measures, and how to stop the spread of germs;
- Procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting spaces, surfaces, and any areas used by students and staff;
- Procedures for restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings, and serving meals in alternate settings such as classrooms;
- Protocols for sporting activities consistent with the CDC Considerations for Youth Sports;
- Schedules for training faculty and staff on the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan; and
- Systems for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the Health and Safety Plan.

The plan may consider the following:

- Guidelines on the use of masks by all staff and/or students;
- Occupancy limits that follow local and state guidelines on classroom size that allows for social distancing;
- Methods of limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces;
- Methods of staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways and ensuring regular cleaning;
- Procedures for limiting the sharing of materials among students;
- Processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors or volunteers; and
- Protocols for adjusting transportation schedules and practices to create social distancing between students.

PHASE THREE



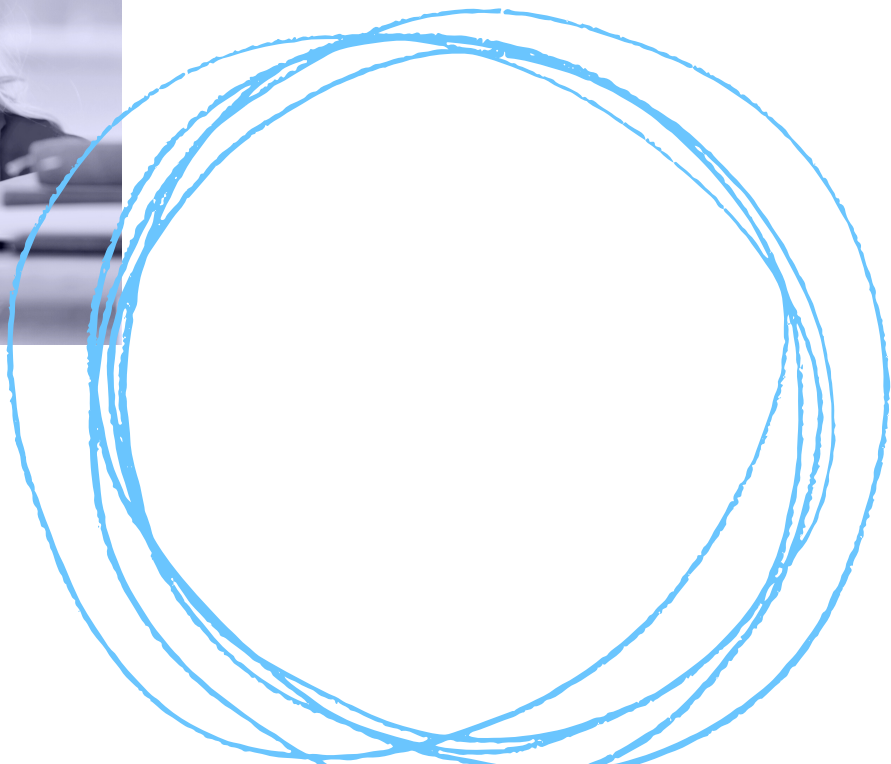


The following best practices may be considered to assist in the planning process:

Academic.

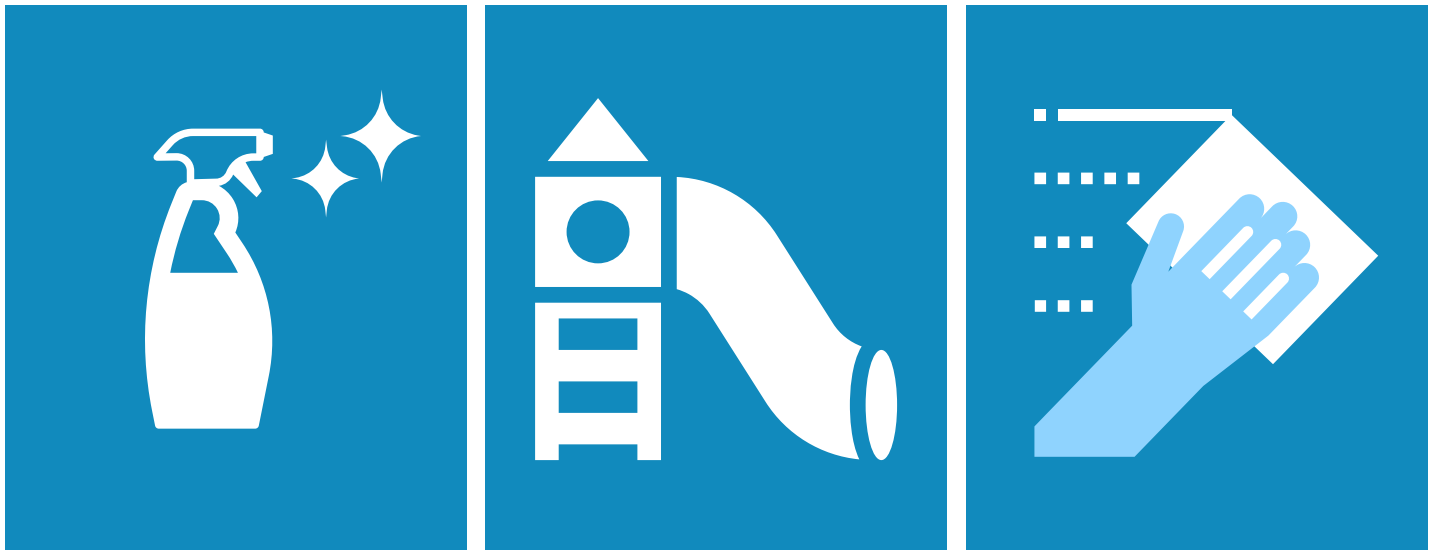
- Students and/or teachers in an at-risk group or those caring for individuals in an at-risk group should have additional accommodations provided to them including teaching classes remotely, utilizing a larger classroom where social distancing can be maintained, or given an option not to return until the risks are reduced.
 - Schools that reopen will need to take into consideration that some teachers and staff will fall into the at-risk category because of their age or other health risks or are caring for someone in an at-risk group.
 - Students who are high risk or who have family members who are high risk should not be penalized for failing to attend and should continue to receive remote support.
 - Accommodations should also be extended to students and staff who are required to quarantine due to exposure or potential exposure.
- Develop a plan to distribute learning materials and technology devices to students receiving offsite instruction;
- Train staff to serve students through remote learning;
- Address any digital divide that may exist within the community or student body to ensure equitable access to instruction for staff and students;

- Create sufficient communication protocols to assist parents and students with offsite learning;
- Prepare for a seamless switch from offsite to onsite through professional development, flexible student, and staff schedules;
- Coordinate with special education staff to ensure Individualized Education Plan teams, including parents, review and update IEPs for special education students and address educational and health services in a manner that can be implemented both offsite and onsite;
- Ensure the availability of staff and access to technology to provide alternative offsite instruction options for students who may request remote learning;
- Implement a technology troubleshooting hotline for parents and students to access when encountering difficulty with available resources; and
- Establish protocols for students to remain in the same groups or classroom, while teachers rotate when practical.



Physical & Structural.

- Review implementation of staggered student arrival times to minimize crowding near school entrances;
- Keep libraries, gyms, playgrounds off-limits unless they can be sanitized between groups;
- Install physical barriers and post guidelines for general hygiene in areas of high traffic where distancing cannot be implemented;
- Break larger classes into smaller groups;
- Separate student desks as much as possible;
- Disinfect all work areas, counters, restrooms, doorknobs, and stair railings;
- Clean all hallways, common areas, and the outside of lockers;
- Air conditioning system filters should be cleaned and changed;
- Allow for cleaning time in classrooms;
- Ensure the school is thoroughly ventilated and cleaned—opening all doors and windows or turning the air conditioning/heating systems up;
- School office staff are encouraged to continually wipe down counters, faxes, copiers, telephones keyboards and use sanitized pens in the main office;
- Provide masks for those present in the school building; and
- Monitor and screen any non-school staff, including parents, when entering school buildings.



Social, Emotional, & Behavioral.

- Ensure staff are trained to identify students struggling with trauma;
- Provide training and resources on recovering from traumatic events;
- Share information with parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies;
- Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available; and
- Expand mental health outreach and treatment strategies, including online appointments.

PROVIDE TRAINING

Ensure staff are trained to identify students struggling with trauma and more. Provide training and resources on recovering from traumatic events

KEEP PARENTS INFORMED

Share information with parents regarding helping children cope with tragedies

SHARE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Notify teachers, staff, students, and parents about support services available

PRIORITIZE OUTREACH EFFORTS

Expand mental health outreach and treatment strategies, including online appointments.



HOW TO KEEP STUDENTS SAFE ON THE BUS



Utilize the flexibility in the transportation fund to provide instructional services to students



Clean buses after each bus route



Reduce bus loads to allow for adequate social distancing



Assign seats to students on the bus

Transportation.

- Utilize the flexibility in the transportation fund to provide instructional services to students;
- Clean buses after each bus route;
- Reduce bus loads to allow for adequate social distancing; and
- Assign seats to students on the bus.

Business.

- Review Model Emergency Policy 1900 Series to select and adopt appropriate policies and options that will enhance and support school district operations;
- Review existing district policies cross referenced in the emergency policy series to ensure those policies are in place and workable during a public health emergency;
- Contact county emergency manager to assess PPE supply chain; and
- Determine information technology status and operational needs.

Extracurricular, Activities, & Athletics.

- Review the size and type of events that may be held at a school facility and implement various guidelines based on number of attendees, location, and arrangement of facilities;
- Accommodate at-risk individuals who may not be able to attend events and gatherings at the school facility;
- Establish staggered mealtimes and additional facilities if social distancing cannot be accomplished;
- Encourage greater use of online/virtual events;
- Use outdoor venues if they allow for better spacing and air flow;
- Frequently disinfect all equipment before physical education classes, band, choir, CTE, robotics, etc.;
- Frequently disinfect all equipment before and after events of any school teams; and
- Identify whether travel is appropriate given the current stage of the pandemic.



- ✓ **Lowest Risk:** Performing skill-building drills or conditioning at home, alone or with family members.
- ✓ **Increasing Risk:** Team-based practice.
- ✓ **More Risk:** Within-team competition.
- ✓ **Even More Risk:** Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area.
- ✓ **Highest Risk:** Full competition between teams from different geographic areas.

(CDC Considerations for Youth Sports)

Additional Resources.

CDC Considerations for Schools

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>

CDC Print Resources

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc)

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CDC Youth and Summer Camps

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html>

CDC Face Coverings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

CDC Hand Washing Information

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>

CDC Social Distancing

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Model Emergency Policy 1900 Series

https://issuu.com/montanaschoolboardsassociation/docs/mtsba_1900_series_model_policies?fr=sODk0NzY0NTY5NA

National Federation of High School Sports Associations

https://www.nfhs.org/media/3812287/2020-nfhs-guidance-for-opening-up-high-school-athletics-and-activities-nfhs-smac-may-15_2020-final.pdf

OPI Guidelines

<http://opi.mt.gov/Re-opening-School>

Montana High School Association Guidelines

<http://www.mhsa.org/>



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