

Introduction

In early May 2020, Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) convened a “Return to School Task Force” to craft initial guidance to support a safe and welcoming return to school for students, teachers, support staff, and visitors. The [Return to School Planning Guide](#) is the collaborative product of that work. The guide, which was finalized on June 26, 2020, provides a framework to guide the division’s ongoing and comprehensive planning efforts to safely, successfully and equitably reopen our schools in alignment with guidance we receive from public health officials and the Virginia Department of Education. The four focus areas addressed by the guide include healthy environments, healthy staff, healthy students, and healthy learning.

At their meeting on July 30, 2020, the Albemarle County School Board reviewed a staged approach to opening schools for the 2020-21 school year. The board considered five stages ranging from a fully virtual model to a return to in-person learning for all, and ultimately approved starting school on September 8, 2020, in Stage 2, which includes virtual learning for most students and in-person access for a limited number of students.

Details about our stages of returning, including information about the transition between stages, are available on our [Stages of Returning](#) web page. This web page is part of our [Return to School](#) website, which includes a wealth of information, guidance and resources for families and employees related to our transition to the 2020-21 school year.

In response to the health and safety challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in an effort to support a healthy and safe physical environment for our students, employees, and community members, ACPS is developing policies, protocols and procedures in alignment with guidance from public health officials, including the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the Virginia Department of Health (VDH); the local Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD); and other nationally recognized guidance. As they are established, ACPS shares these plans with the public through our [Health and Safety Practices](#) web page on our Return to School website.

Per an order from the Virginia Public Health Commissioner, each private school and public school division operating in the Commonwealth must develop a plan for implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies before reopening in accordance with the [Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools](#). ACPS is providing the following COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plan to fulfill this requirement. The plan is structured according to the [Phase III Health Plan Guidance/ Template Document](#) provided by the Commonwealth.

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1. Local Public Health Conditions

- a. Do you consider your community to be one with no or minimal case transmission? If so, what public health metrics or considerations informed your assessment?
 - As of August 16, 2020, the community in which ACPS is located is between low and moderate for rates of transmission based on the VDH report of case incidence, testing percent positivity, and the trend of both metrics.
- b. Will your health mitigation strategies vary from the [Phase Guidance](#) in any major ways? If so, how? (e.g., no physical distancing on buses; athletic competitions; etc.)
 - ACPS health mitigation strategies either align with or are more restrictive than the Phase Guidance provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The only exception is that while physical distancing will be implemented on buses, it is not practical for us to implement the example given (i.e., students seated every other seat). Students will be seated one child per seat and face masks will be required. These two strategies will be implemented in conjunction with a layering of other mitigation efforts. Our full [Transportation Health Plan](#) is provided on our Return to School website.

2. Planning to Reopen

- a. Establish a COVID-19 team within the school division and a point person at each school facility. Provide names of staff and contact information.
 - The division-level COVID-19 team includes representatives from Operations, Technology, Human Resources, Communications, and Instruction. Also included on the team is a COVID-19 Coordinator who was hired to oversee health services related to the pandemic. Each school-based COVID-19 team will include the school nurse, a school administrator, and a designated supply liaison.

- b. Know the contact information and procedures for reaching the local health department. Provide the name of a specific point of contact and direct contact information for that person.

➤ The points of contact for the Thomas Jefferson Health District are:

- 1) Kenneth Gordon: 434-972-4305; Kenneth.Gordon@vdh.virginia.gov
- 2) Kate Baker: 434-422-3210; Katlyn.Baker@vdh.virginia.gov
- 3) Ryan McKay: 434-972-6295; Ryan.McKay@vdh.virginia.gov

- c. Plan for health and absenteeism monitoring/approaches. Provide the mechanism/program/process for tracking attendance and interventions, when necessary.

➤ Student absenteeism will be monitored daily. Front office staff or the school nurse will contact the parent/guardian of a student without a scheduled absence to determine the reason for the student's absence. Codes will be added to the student information system to indicate absences due to COVID-19-like illness and those due to quarantine or parent choice. The school will note trends and report increased absences to the COVID-19 Coordinator, who will notify the health department. (See [Monitoring Student Absenteeism](#).)

- d. Develop, and describe below, a communications strategy that includes:

- i. Orientation and training for staff and students specific to new COVID-19 mitigation strategies;

➤ All staff will be required to participate in division-wide training specific to COVID-19 mitigation strategies and verify completion. Topics include, but are not limited to, an understanding of the basics of COVID-19 (including risk factors, signs/symptoms, etc.), PPE, handwashing, social distancing and other safety measures, cleaning protocols, heat-related illness, and the nondiscrimination policy. The Albemarle County School Board's new [Policy on Masks and Acceptable Face Coverings](#), as well as communication expectations (including appropriate contact information) for employees should they become ill, will be included as part of the training. Training will be provided in compliance with Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH) requirements. Prior to this formal training, all principals and department leaders are communicating COVID-19 mitigation strategies and safety protocols to staff.

All students will also receive training on COVID-19 mitigation strategies. When schools open in Stage 2, orientation and training will be provided to students by their Learning Coach. In future [Stages of Returning](#), videos for students and families will be posted and promoted by principals on school websites and included in orientation

material. Topics will address hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, use of cloth face coverings, staying home when sick, and the importance of physical distancing.

ii. Plans for communication with staff, parents and students of new policies;

➤ Important information regarding policies and processes related to COVID-19 and reopening schools for the 2020-21 school year is posted on the ACPS [Return to School](#) website. The website includes a Google Translate tool that allows visitors to view content in the language of their choice. The division also communicates with school families using mass messaging, including email, voice and text messages. Internal messaging for employees is handled primarily through posts in the [Compass](#), the ACPS employee news blog. All employees receive new Compass posts via email, and the Compass website is accessible online 24/7. Additionally, the school division uses email and video messaging to notify employees of important information.

iii. Plans for how to communicate an outbreak or positive cases detected at the school.

➤ With the assistance of our Office of Strategic Communications, the nurse and principal will work with the health department to determine the type and distributive scope of notification to parents regarding case investigation and possible quarantine. In the event of a confirmed case at a school, communication will be sent to parents of all students in the school regarding the incident, the risk to their child, and actions advised by the health department. Individuals considered close contacts will receive separate notification and guidance. (See [Notifications](#).)

e. Describe the division or school's participation in community response efforts.

➤ The division cohosted four ACPS Community Roundtables focused on addressing child care and supportive learning needs in our community. Meetings were attended by 16 of the 41 child care agencies and youth development organizations invited. Outcomes included securing K-5 classroom furniture; coordinating meal distribution with youth programs serving eligible ACPS families; facilitating IT support for training and technical needs of instructional coaches; and providing support for grant/funding proposals for extended enrichment programming.

Additionally, division staff participated in Charlottesville Area Network Dedicated to Youth Development (CANDYD) and United Way Emergency Relief meetings and the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce's Project Rebound as a contributor to the Anchor Institutions Subcommittee, which produced COVID-19 Recovery Recommendations and a Final Report.

The division continues to be inspired by individuals and organizations that are reaching out to us to support our students, their families, and our employees. These offers, for example, range from providing meals, books, school supplies, and personal protective items to

tutoring and mentorships. In response, the division established a COVID-19 School and Community Partner Initiative, which seeks to review offers of support, oversee the implementation process, and monitor performance, all while ensuring compliance with COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.

- f. Prepare your division's student health services. Are you doing the following:
 - i. Assure provision of medical-grade PPE for health services staff;
 - Medical-grade surgical masks, gloves, isolation gowns, and scrubs will be provided to health services staff.
 - ii. Assure and maintain typical (non-COVID-19) health services;
 - School nurses will separate ill students from those seeking care for non-illness conditions such as injuries and routine care. (See [Clinic Space and Procedures](#).)
 - iii. Describe how you will assure the maintenance of routine mental health services.
 - School counselors will be available and proactively checking and connecting with students and families. Elementary counselors will be doing weekly social and emotional learning (SEL) lessons, small group sessions, and individual meetings. Secondary counselors will hold individual counseling sessions both proactively and by appointment. All K-12 counselors will be connecting with both school administrators and classroom teachers regarding the mental health of students. Additionally, school counselors will continue working closely with our school and community partners to support our families.

3. Promoting Behaviors That Reduce Spread of COVID-19

- a. Create an education/training plan for staff, students and families. Consider COVID-19 prevention education (hand washing, staying home if ill, etc.). Education should be part of staff and student orientations and to be sent to all parties before reopening schools. Does your training and communication to school community members include the promotion of the following?
 - i. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,
 - ii. Use of cloth face coverings,
 - iii. Staying home when sick,
 - iv. Encouraging physical distancing.
 - Please refer to the response provided for 2(d)i, [Orientation and training for staff and students specific to new COVID-19 mitigation strategies](#).

- b. Maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene.
 - Adequate supplies of hand sanitizer, disposable and reusable face coverings, disposable gloves, hand soap, paper products, disinfectant, disinfectant wipes, face shields, goggles, and disposable gowns are available. Reliable vendors are in place to continue to meet the division's needs.
- c. Provide signs and messaging to promote healthy hygiene.
 - i. Proper handwashing at classroom sinks and group restrooms
 - ii. Physical distancing throughout the building
 - iii. Hand sanitizer dispenser locations
 - iv. Site requirements at main entry points in multiple languages
 - v. Symptom list in multiple languages at front entry
 - Signage is installed in schools to promote all of the above.
- d. Promote physical distancing. Explain how you will promote physical distancing, including the following:
 - i. Modify layouts of classrooms, communal areas, and buses to ensure social distancing is maintained.
 - Floorplans have been developed to identify the capacity of each learning space when social distancing is in place. Classroom furniture will be arranged to ensure 6 feet of distance between students. Additional desks have been purchased to allow for such arrangements. Communal spaces will either be closed or repurposed as instructional space. More information about specific spaces can be found in the [Return to School Planning Guide](#) in the “Buildings and Grounds” section under [Healthy Environments](#).

To limit the number of students on a bus at a time and to provide physical distance between riders, students will be seated one person per seat. Family members may be seated together, but no more than two per seat.
 - ii. Develop strategies for food/dining services; these should be consistent with plans to optimize physical distancing.
 - Students participating in virtual learning when we open in Stage 2 may pick up meals at their bus stop each day at an assigned midday delivery time. Bus routes are being established based on registration for school meals. COVID-19 health and safety protocols will be observed during the delivery process. Students returning to school through in-person access will receive meals at their school site. In elementary schools, meals will be served and eaten in classrooms. In secondary schools, students will pick

up their meal from the cafeteria and then return to their classroom to eat. Signage posted at serving lines will promote social distancing.

- iii. Limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing space during gatherings.
 - Gathering sizes and protocols will follow any current executive or local ordinance.
- iv. Follow relevant Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools and [CDC guidance](#) for recreational sports for school-related sports and other recreational activities.
 - When we open in Stage 2, the division will not offer athletics or in-person extracurricular activities. In future stages, students may participate in athletics or in-person extracurricular activities upon approval. For each sport or activity, schools must submit a plan in accordance with the Virginia High School League (VHSL) guidelines for review and approval by ACPS. (See [Stages of Returning](#).)

4. Maintaining Healthy Environments and Operations

- a. Plan for health monitoring of staff and students. Your plan should address if health screenings of students or staff take place, and if so, when, where, and by whom.
 - Each school day, prior to allowing their child to board a school bus or enter a school building, parents/guardians are responsible for completing an at-home health screening of their child for COVID-19 symptoms. (See [Daily At-Home COVID-19 Screening for Students](#).) All employees are required to perform a self-assessment before leaving home and again upon building entry. All visitors to ACPS facilities will be required to undergo a health screening for COVID-19 symptoms upon building entry. (See [ACPS Facilities COVID-19 Screening for Employees & Visitors](#).) Upon building entry, temperature checks will be conducted of all students, employees and visitors. (See “Daily Screenings” on the [School Health Services Procedures](#) web page.)
- b. Hygiene Practices: Are you promoting the following hygiene practices?
 - i. Create cleaning and disinfection protocols that include frequently touched surfaces; transport vehicles; schedules for increased cleaning, routine cleaning, and disinfection; ensuring adequate cleaning supplies and correct use/storage.
 - Cleaning and disinfection protocols have been developed, and custodial staff have been trained on the enhanced cleaning and disinfection processes. (See [Cleaning and Disinfection Protocol](#).)

- ii. Provide additional hand sanitizer/handwashing stations.
 - Handwashing stations in classrooms and group restrooms will be utilized. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been added to every classroom and building entry point.
- iii. Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing to the extent possible (e.g., dedicated student supplies, lab equipment, computers, etc.).
 - Each student works with a personal laptop or tablet. Teachers are planning to minimize sharing of materials, and any materials that must be shared will be disinfected between users.
- c. Have you ensured ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible?
 - Yes. Our Building Automation System has been programmed to increase outdoor air as much as possible. Proper operation of existing systems is a priority through our preventive maintenance work order system. (See [HVAC Protocol](#).)
- d. Have you ensured that water systems are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown? Please include water fountains as part of your considerations.
 - Yes. Flushing of building water systems, including water fountains, has been part of our protocol during biweekly building checks when schools were shut down and has increased as essential personnel have returned to buildings. Water fountains will be turned off when students return, but sensor-operated bottle fillers will be accessible and flushed prior to use. Additional bottle fillers have been installed to improve access.
- e. Do your plans for gatherings, field trips, and volunteer restrictions align with the Executive Order in effect?
 - Yes. Large gatherings and field trips are not allowed at this time. Furthermore, non-essential visitors will not be allowed in buildings.
- f. Have you trained back-up staff to ensure continuity of operations? Please consider both instructional and support positions.
 - For instructional positions, coverage will be provided by school-based or division-level employees as needed. For temporary employees hired as substitutes, the safety mitigation training provided to all ACPS staff will be required. Additional training will be provided for those hired to be virtual substitutes. Supervisors will determine cross-training and back-up procedures for support positions in their school or department.

5. Protecting Vulnerable Individuals (e.g., 65+, underlying health conditions):

- a. What policy options have you created to support those students and staff at higher risk for severe illness to limit their exposure risk (e.g., telework, modified job duties, virtual learning opportunities)?
 - Our [Stages of Returning](#) represent a continuum that moves from a fully virtual model to a return to in-person learning for all. We will open schools on September 8, 2020, in Stage 2, which includes virtual learning for most students and in-person access for a limited number of students. As such, most teachers will be able to teach virtually. Teachers and other staff returning to in-person work with students are those who volunteered to work in that manner. A determination for transitioning from stage to stage will occur quarterly. As those decisions are made, staff may request telework and virtual teaching accommodations. Priority will be given to those who are determined to be high-risk based on CDC guidelines or who have related ADA needs. Liberal use of Leave of Absence (LOA) (short-term and long-term) is in effect for those who qualify. Employees may apply for an LOA within one week of the stage decision being made each quarter. Contract signing extensions were provided for licensed staff to allow for a full understanding of the initial return to school stage.
- b. Describe flexible sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed.
 - Employees who need to stay home to self-isolate due to exposure to COVID-19 at work will use Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) emergency sick leave and/or administrative leave. Employees will not be required to use their own sick leave balances.
- c. Describe your policies for return to class/work after COVID-19 illness.
 - If an individual has symptoms, they should stay home from class/work until: (1) at least 10 days have passed from the onset of symptoms; AND (2) the individual has been fever-free for 24 continuous hours without the use of fever reducing medications; AND (3) respiratory symptoms have improved. If the individual tests positive in a diagnostic COVID-19 test, but has no symptoms and remains asymptomatic, they should stay home until at least 10 days have passed since the positive diagnostic test result. (See [Return to School or Work Criteria After Diagnosis of COVID-19](#).)

6. Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick

Please describe how your plan addresses the following:

- a. Separate and isolate those who present with symptoms.
- b. Facilitate safe transportation of those who are sick to home or healthcare facility.
- c. Implement cleansing and disinfection procedures of areas used by sick individuals.
- d. Develop a communications plan with the local health department to initiate public health investigation, contact tracing and consultation on next steps.

➤ Students with symptoms of illness will be escorted to a designated isolation room while waiting for a parent or designee to take them home. Staff who experience illness symptoms will be asked to call for backup to supervise students so they can leave the building promptly. See [Protocol for Management of Illness at School](#) on the School Health Services web page for more details about our plan for when someone develops COVID-19-like symptoms at school.

7. Planning to Close Down If Necessary, Due to Severe Conditions

Please describe which conditions, if any, will trigger:

- a. A reduction in in-person classes
- b. A complete school closure
- c. A complete division closure

➤ The decision to close a building or buildings will be made by the Superintendent of Schools in conjunction with local health officials based on factors that include, but are not limited to, extent of an identified outbreak in an ACPS facility; COVID-19 conditions in the community; absenteeism rates among staff and students; and local and/or state ordinances/orders. (See [Protocol for Confirmed Case of COVID-19](#).)