Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness

Planning and Coordination

The Superintendent or designee in conjunction with the School Medical Advisor, shall serve as a liaison between the Bethany Public School District (District) and local and state health officials. The Superintendent and the School Medical Advisor are jointly responsible for connecting with health officials to identify local hazards, determine what crisis plans exist in the District and community, and to establish procedures to account for student well being and safety during such a crisis. The Superintendent shall work with local health officials to determine when the risk of a pandemic or epidemic of a serious illness has materially increased.

School administration shall develop a curriculum component to health classes that are designed to teach students about preventing or limiting the spread of communicable diseases.

The District shall purchase and store supplies necessary for a pandemic/epidemic outbreak, including, but not limited to disinfectant products, face masks, water, examination gloves, and other supplies as recommended by the school nurse and/or School Medical Advisor and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH).

The Superintendent shall develop procedures and plans for the transportation of students in the event of an evacuation. Such procedures shall include provisions for students who cannot be transported home at the time of the evacuation.

Response

In the event anyone within the school is discovered or suspected to have a communicable disease that may result in a pandemic/epidemic, that person shall be immediately quarantined pending further medical examination, as recommended by state and national protocols. Local and state health officials shall be notified immediately.

In conjunction with local and state health officials, the Superintendent shall ascertain whether an evacuation (school closing), lockdown, or shelter-in-place needs to be established. As soon as such a decision has been made, the District shall notify the parents/guardians of all students.

In the event of an evacuation (school closing), the Superintendent, in conjunction with local and state health officials, is charged with determining when the school shall reopen. In the event of a lockdown or shelter-in-place, the Superintendent shall notify all proper authorities and relief agencies to seek their assistance for the duration of the lockdown or shelter-in-place.

Infection Control

Any student or staff member found to be infected with a communicable disease that bears risk of pandemic/epidemic will not be allowed to attend school until medical clearance is provided by that individual's primary care physician or other medical personnel indicating that the person does not bear the risk of transmitting the communicable disease.

Students with excessive absences due to a communicable disease shall be given a reprieve from other Board policies relative to excessive student absences. Efforts will be made by the staff to determine what, if any, school work the student can complete while absent.

Staff members who are forced to miss excessive days of work shall first use any leave entitled to them through the Family and Medical Leave Act, accrued sick leave, and/or any other leave entitlement. If a staff member has still not received medical clearance to resume work duties, absences in excess of a staff member's allotted leave may be managed through existing contract provisions and will not affect the employee's right to continued employment.

Continuance of Education

The Superintendent shall develop a plan of alternate means of educating students in the event of prolonged school closings and/or extended absences. Such a remote learning plan may include but are not limited to, providing students with assignments via mail, email, video conferencing, Google classroom, or the State of Connecticut Learning Hub.

The Superintendent, in consultation with the Board, may amend the traditional class schedule and schedule of days. Such a plan may include extending the school day, having school days held on Saturdays if Connecticut statute changes, the use of previously scheduled vacation days, and/or extend the school year beyond the previously established end of the school year, within applicable statutory requirements.

Preventative Measures for Schools to Protect Students and Staff

The DPH recommends the school considers the following to prevent the spread of illness:

1. Adhere to existing District health protocols for any staff/student presenting as ill or any staff/student who may have been exposed to a contagious disease. Follow established exclusion recommendations for acute respiratory illness (patients should be fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning to school).
2. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
3. Provide adequate soap, paper towels, and other cleaning supplies in bathrooms and other wash areas.
4. Avoid close contact with people who are sick and encourage families to keep ill students at home.
5. Remind students to cover their mouths and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not hands) when coughing and sneezing.
6. Have custodial staff clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces according to product direction and their facility's policy.
7. Strongly promote the annual flu shot for all students and staff.

The District must stay informed, listen to public health messages, and implement good public health practices to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. The local health department should be contacted regarding questions about individuals who have recently traveled to countries with a high incidence of respiratory illnesses.

Emergency Response

In the event of a declared pandemic/epidemic, a four-level system shall be used with guidelines to provide interventions and activities in which the District shall engage. These activities involve areas such as communication with parents/guardians and students, field trips and other school activities, school closing or modified school schedules, school access, and instructional issues. Although it is important that staff be trained in and employ these procedures, it must also be understood that the administration may need to make changes on a case-by-case basis as new information or events rapidly evolve.

It is important that all plans be coordinated and aligned as much as possible with neighboring school districts, appropriate medical services, public health, mental health, law enforcement, fire department, and emergency management representatives.

In terms of the difficult decision to close schools, two main reasons exist for this action:

1. In the event where an increase in school absenteeism is noted between either or both students and staff, reporting to the School Medical Advisor and the local health department shall be communicated by the school nurse on a regularly scheduled basis.
    a. Such communication will be made by the school nurse when observed illnesses or absences for respiratory, gastrointestinal, or vaccine-preventable illnesses are deemed to be excessive.
    b. reporting shall include influenza-like illness with symptoms of fever greater than 100 degrees F, AND sore throat or cough to the local health department and School Medical Advisor weekly during an outbreak.
    c. Depending on illness or exposure, social distancing measures may be instituted including school closures.
2. There could be levels of absenteeism among staff and/or students that make it difficult to achieve the educational mission of the school The decision to close on this basis is an individual District decision made in conjunction with the School Medical Advisor and/or the local health department. The school may be closed if absenteeism is in the range of 30% to 40%.
3. The school could close specifically to slow the spread of influenza. Close contact among many persons in the school makes them a center for respiratory disease transmission. If school closing for this purpose is to be effective, it should be done early in an epidemic before absenteeism rates climb very high and in concert with other agencies and upon the advice of the Connecticut Department of Education or the DPH.
4. In addition, to be effective, students and staff must stay apart from each other when they are not in school. A decision for school closing, for this reason, is usually made under advice or command from state agencies or the local health department. The length of school closing shall be made under guidance from these agencies and can vary from several days to several weeks. Superintendents in neighboring Districts will work together to make decisions on how the school closing impacts the other schools, in terms of transportation, child care, instruction, and family issues.

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes § 10-154a
Connecticut General Statutes § 10-207
Connecticut General Statutes § 10-209
Connecticut General Statutes § 10-210
Connecticut General Statutes § 19a-221
20 U.S.C. 1232g. 45 C.F.R. 99 (FERPA)

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