



12 Principles for Safer Schools

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Many schools in the U.S. and beyond have begun the 2020–21 academic year under a variety of models, policies, and community conditions. As part of our mission to bridge science and schools to support informed decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic, the [ABC Science Collaborative](https://abcsciencecollaborative.org) has been tracking their experiences closely. We can now share these **12 actions to take prior to reopening** based on what we've learned. These principles are intended to serve as a guide; all decisions on returning to in-person learning and working should be made in collaboration with your state and local health departments.

Twelve actions for reopening wisely:

1

BE TRANSPARENT. [Some schools](#) are reporting all primary COVID-19 cases by week, and this should be an approach every school adopts. We know that schools are rarely super-spreaders and that infection rates in schools are reflective of infection rates in communities — not vice versa. Reporting primary cases demystifies this fact. Districts (and/or states) should also provide public reporting of linked cases or clusters (defined in North Carolina as greater than 5 linked cases), so we all have a transparent account of where infection rates stand. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has an excellent [example](#) of such reporting.

2

MAKE A ROAD MAP FOR CONTACT TRACING AND TESTING. The school district and local health department(s) should put into writing and make available publicly a “road map” for exactly who will do what in a successful contact tracing. This should include timing and the details of how that happens and highlight any differences in how this is done for young children (who may not have effective verbal communication) and adults. Wake County Public School System has an [example](#). Routine testing of all identified close contacts should be an essential component of this plan, and rapid return of testing results will allow for quicker action and decreased secondary spread.

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For more information about the program, contact: abcsciencecollaborative@duke.edu.

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3

DEVELOP A DASHBOARD. All school districts should have line of sight to community COVID-19 data for pandemic management. This dashboard should include not only numbers available to the public, like primary cases and clusters, but also information on secondary transmission that might emerge as clusters, quarantine, testing rates and comparisons to county-wide data.

4

IMPLEMENT LESSONS LEARNED. Whenever there is a cluster or secondary transmission, school leadership should work with staff to contextualize and understand the event and to implement lessons learned.

5

WORK WITH A TRUSTED 3RD PARTY TO ANALYZE DATA. For example, the ABC Science Collaborative offers analysis of secondary transmission adjusted for population. The Collaborative also has worked with districts on assembling and distributing lessons learned regionally.

6

LEVERAGE AVAILABLE METRICS. Given the experience in North Carolina, Missouri, and elsewhere, we have data to inform how much COVID-19 spread to expect in schools if there is adherence to masking, physical distancing, and hand washing. These metrics are secondary transmission per 10,000 students and number of clusters per 10,000 students. These metrics are preferable to county data because the crucial element of managing schools is to prevent spread within schools. The details of these metrics for considering when to move from in-person to remote instruction can vary by district, and the precision of these metrics will improve as we gain experience. However, the concepts of secondary transmission and cluster prevention as co-primary goals are important. See the ABC Science Collaborative [FAQ](#).

7

MAKE A DETAILED SCHEDULE. The details of how students, staff, and visitors will adhere to masking, physical distancing, and hand hygiene for the entire school day should be customized for the school. Examples for elementary, middle, and high schools are available from the ABC Science Collaborative.

8

CONSIDER EXTRACURRICULARS. In addition to a detailed plan for the general school day, also develop a detailed plan for all extracurricular and school-sponsored activities, such as sports and the arts.

9

CONSIDER SPECIAL NEEDS. This group of teachers and students need additional precautions. Plans should be developed locally, and these groups should receive allocation of extra resources because masking is not always possible. This might include additional PPE, flexible hours, face shields, and creative approaches to ventilation and airflow.

10

ACKNOWLEDGE PANDEMIC FATIGUE, BUT STAY ADHERENT. Pandemic fatigue is real, but so are the data that show that we should target >99 percent adherence to masking by all mainstream curriculum students, teachers, and staff on school property at all times (except for eating and drinking) to be safe. Remember to explain to students why this is so critical. "I wear a mask to protect you; you wear a mask to protect me," is something that can resonate with even the youngest students. Implement strategies to ensure long-term adherence to mask compliance, distancing, and hand hygiene. This may be accomplished via an anonymous hot line or web portal to report non-compliance or a simple daily walk-through to check that all masks are over the nose, mouth and chin.

11

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR CASES, SECONDARY TRANSMISSION, AND CLUSTERS. When these events occur, how will districts communicate, with whom, and when? Develop a communication plan that is detailed, but also amenable to revision as new data and insights come to light.

12

WALK, THEN RUN. Starting back to in-person learning slowly (for example, in a hybrid model) can give everyone a chance to adapt to the new procedures and policies.