



## Parent-Friendly FAQ as of August 31, 2020

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is relying on the science and data from the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to inform all our decisions regarding the reopening of schools. The changing nature and understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic mean that the answers to these questions may change frequently. For the most up-to-date information regarding the reopening of schools, please visit [Back2SchoolRI.com](http://Back2SchoolRI.com).

### Health and Safety

#### **Will all students have to wear masks for the entire school day?**

- Masks are required in the K-12 setting, even when students are in stable groups and socially distanced (greater than six feet apart). The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) understands and supports the exceptions to wearing masks for health considerations, as outlined in the CDC guidance. If a mask cannot be tolerated during vigorous exercise, additional physical distance is recommended (greater than 14 feet). Consult your local school plan for more information.

#### **Are schools providing masks for students to wear?**

- Many schools and districts are working tirelessly to secure safety supplies, such as masks and hand sanitizers for every teacher and student. To determine if your school or district is providing masks or other supplies, please contact your school's principal or visit the school or district's website.

#### **What are stable groups?**

- Stable groups are made up of the same people every day, and they stay together — in the classroom, in recess, and when eating. In some scenarios, those groups are no larger than 30 including teachers and aides; in other scenarios, the group size reduces to 15. Consult your [local school plan](#) for more information.

#### **Am I expected to screen my child every morning?**

- Families should consult their [local school plan](#) for more information; however, families should complete this important check every day. The COVID-19 screening tool is an attestation form that asks questions about symptoms and risks of exposure in order to determine if a person should be allowed to enter the school or workplace. Your child's school leader will provide you with details about how to complete this form.

#### **What guidance does RIDOH have for schools to use to determine which students are too medically vulnerable to return to school?**

- The decision regarding whether or not a child is too medically vulnerable to return to school should be determined by the child's physician in consultation with the family.

**For months, all guidance has defined social distancing as staying six feet. apart. Why are we hearing three feet. apart in schools? Is there medical evidence to support this guidance?**

- Currently there is not a minimum number of feet of physical distance that must be maintained.
- The six-foot guidance is to reduce spread between individuals. If students/adults are unable to maintain a six-foot distance, then additional mitigation efforts should be used (face covering, cleaning spaces/supplies, not facing one another) and the spacing should be as close to six feet as possible.
- The six-foot guidance comes from recent American Academy of Pediatrics [guidance](#): "...the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools "space seating/desks at least six feet apart when feasible." In many school settings, six feet between students is not feasible without limiting the number of students. Evidence suggests that spacing as close as three feet may approach the benefits of six feet of space, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic. Schools should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a six-foot spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative.... Given what is known about transmission dynamics, adults and adult staff within schools should attempt to maintain a distance of six feet from other persons as much as possible, particularly around other adult staff".

### What happens if a student or staff member experiences symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day?

- **Student:** Any student with symptom(s) of COVID-19, but does not meet the CDC definition of a probable case before the school day begins must isolate and stay home. If they develop symptoms while at school, the child should be taken to the school nurse and the isolation room immediately. Parents/guardians should be notified to pick up the student within the hour. Parents/guardians should seek medical advice for the student within 48 hours and schedule a COVID-19 test. Symptomatic students will not be permitted to return to school until they obtain a negative COVID-19 test or have been fever-free for 24 hours, and symptoms improved.
- **Staff:** Any staff member with symptom(s) of COVID-19, but does not meet the CDC definition of a probable case before the school day begins must isolate and stay home. If they develop symptoms while at school, the staff member should go home and isolate immediately. Staff members should seek medical advice within 48 hours and schedule a COVID-19 test. Symptomatic staff members will not be permitted to return to school until they obtain a negative COVID-19 test or have been fever-free for 24 hours, and symptoms improved.

### What happens if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

- If a student or staff members test positive for COVID-19, they must meet the CDC/RIDOH guidelines for ending isolation before returning to school.
- The RIDOH recommends they return once they're fever free for 24 hours, their symptoms have improved, and 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared (20 days if severely immunocompromised).

### How will I be informed if either a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 in any of my child's stable groups (class, school bus, after school, etc.)?

- The [Outbreak Response Protocols: PreK-12](#) playbook provides information specific to a student or staff member testing positive. The childcare [playbook](#) is also available. RIDOH and RIDE will work to educate and communicate the information that is in the playbook to the community.

### What happens if a member of a student (staff) household tests positive for COVID-19?

- If a member of a student or staff's household tests positive for COVID-19, they must quarantine for 14 days after the last exposure to the confirmed case.
- If the close contact lives in the same household, the 14 days of quarantine starts when the confirmed case ends isolation.

**If a student or staff member in a high school tests positive for COVID-19 and they have not been in stable groups, who will need to quarantine?**

- The decisions about who needs to be quarantined will be done in coordination between the school and RIDOH. The school will not have to make these decisions in isolation.

## Instruction

**How do these models for reopening ensure equity for our special populations?**

- All of the reopening models prioritize in-person instruction for our vulnerable populations, such as differently abled students and multilingual learners. RIDE is working with district leaders to ensure these two populations are supported appropriately when schools reopen.

**How can parents of differently abled students ask and receive answers about special education services and programming?**

- As a first step, parents/guardians should reach out to the district special education director to discuss services and supports for students. If parents/guardians have a questions or concerns about the supports and information they receive, RIDE has a dedicated email to support parents/guardians: [ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ridecallcenter@ride.ri.gov).

**Can I choose distance learning for my child?**

- If the RI Department of Health, Governor, and RIDE decide that our health data supports a 100% full in-person return to school scenario, we hope that families will feel comfortable and confident allowing children to return to school in-person. While we would be inviting students to return in-person, we know parents may not yet be comfortable with this option and have encouraged local school districts to include information in their plans with regard to how they will provide distance learning for students who are not returning to in-person learning at the start of the school year.

**Will there be additional guidance put out about revised expectations for Distance Learning and best practices learned from Distance Learning?**

- RIDE will continue to share resources to improve distance learning.

**Will there be before or after school programming?**

- Families are encouraged to contact their school or district for more information on the availability of before and after school programming this school year. However, The Health and Safety Guidance allows for before and after school programming as long as those programs can follow the same guidelines put in place for the school day.

## Reopening Operations

### What is the objective of having a statewide school calendar?

- Given the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, the statewide schedule emerged as part of a comprehensive set of planning tools RIDE intends to release. It allows families to plan for the school year now. It will enable teachers who teach in one district but live in another to balance work and family demands. It allows RIDE to act quickly to a COVID-19 resurgence by facilitating local or statewide moves to distance learning.
- The calendar also allows RIDE to provide more statewide support, such as professional development opportunities that teachers from multiple districts can attend. A standard calendar also creates opportunities for innovation among districts, such as course offerings in one district being available to students from other districts and increased resource coordination.

### Was there a shift to the start of the school year? Why?

- Yes. We are adjusting the first day of classes for students to Monday, September 14. This will give LEAs and school communities more time to prepare for a successful start of the year.

### Whom should I contact if I have questions regarding my school/district's reopening plan?

- Each Local Educational Agency (LEA) has made its plan available to families and post it on their website. Please contact your local district for more information and specifics about your school's plan. Consult your local school plan for more information.

### What will school look like on September 14, the first day of school?

- We have asked all our school districts, charters schools, and state-run schools to put together plans that will allow them to operate under one of four scenarios. These are:
  1. Full in-person for all, where schools resume 100 percent in-person operations, with some distance learning protocols in place;
  2. Partial in-person, where elementary and vulnerable subpopulation in-person attendance is prioritized, and remaining groups begin with distance learning.
  3. Limited in-person, where most students resume distance learning from home and in-person is prioritized for a significantly smaller number of students, specifically those in a vulnerable subpopulation; and
  4. Full distance learning, where circumstances require schools to remain closed to in-person instruction and virtual instruction resumes until further notice.

Each district's plan will describe how school would happen under these scenarios and are available on their websites.

### When will you decide if our students will go back to school in person?

- We expect to make preliminary determinations on which scenario schools should plan for in early August, with final determinations the week of August 31<sup>st</sup>, closer to the statewide opening of schools on

September 14. The latest public health information, backed by data, will be the driving factor in all decisions related to going back to school.

#### **Will all schools automatically be using the same scenario?**

- Not necessarily. The latest public health information, backed by data, will be the driving factor in all decisions related to going back to school. It is possible that districts around the state may open under different scenarios based on the specific public health situation in their communities.

#### **How will you determine if my community is safe enough for full in-person learning?**

- We will be measuring our municipal data by studying case incidence, which is typically measured as a number of new cases per 100,000 residents. Based on the input of our advisory team of health experts and extensive data analysis, we've determined that municipalities (suggestion- cities and towns) must have a weekly case incidence rate of fewer than 100 new cases per 100,000 people in order to fully reopen their schools for in-person learning. We will exclude cases in congregate care settings (i.e. nursing homes), which are not reflective of spread in the community. As of August 5, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence do not meet this threshold. We will use the latest data available before making final decisions on reopening scenarios across the state in mid-August, along with the other four reopening metrics.

#### **Will visitors/volunteers be allowed in school buildings? If so, what are the requirements?**

- Limiting visitors in the school building has been encouraged, since each additional person who enters the building increases the risk of exposure. The policy on visitors should be dependent upon which reopening scenario a district is in (Full in-person, Partial in-person, or Limited in-person). For Partial and Limited In-person scenarios, visitors are not allowed, to the greatest extent possible.
- Schools may encourage only one parent/guardian per student to visit a building when possible and continue to utilize virtual communication options with families. It is also recommended to the extent possible that the same adult drop off and pick up each day for each student.
- All visitors should wear face coverings and only enter and exit the school building via one location. Visitors are required to log in, providing the date, name, a contact phone number, and arrival/departure times.

#### **Are students allowed to share materials at school?**

- Students should be encouraged to use their own materials and school procedures should make every effort to have students only use their own materials as the coronavirus can survive on hard surfaces from hours to days. Additionally, all schools are implementing more aggressive cleaning routines as a part of their safe return to school for all.
- Frequently touched surfaces, classroom objects, desks, and other equipment will be cleaned frequently. Please refer to [local school plans](#) for more information.

#### **Will school staff and/or students be required to be tested prior to the start of school?**

- CDC is not recommending preadmission testing at this time.

#### **Will there continue to be free internet for families in need?**

- RIDE is currently working with vendors to identify any possible opportunities for the opening of School, particularly for those who may need to begin the year in distance learning.

## What is the Education Operations Center?

- On August 24, 2020, as part of a collaborative state agency task force, the Education Operations Center was launched. The purpose of this center is to better support school and district leaders in four response priority areas: operations, logistics, public health, and outreach.
- Staffed with state employees including the Rhode Island Department of Health, the Rhode Island Department of Education, and the Rhode Island National Guard, the goal of the center is to provide schools with support throughout the 2020-2021 school year to maximize the number of students who can return to healthy and safe in-person learning. LEA Assistance Teams will be able to provide on-the-ground outreach to schools to help them solve problems as they arise.
- **How have school and district leaders prepared facilities to make sure the air quality is safe?**
  - RIDE and RIDOH released Back to School RI: COVID-19 Facilities and Physical plant Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools on August 24, 2020. This guidance document provides in depth information for school and district leaders on ventilation and HVAC, water and plumbing, cleaning and disinfecting, as well as compliance with state codes. Additionally, there will be a walkthrough of every school building by interagency teams of professionals prior to the start of school in order to provide school leaders with information on how their health and safety plans are being implemented in school buildings.