
GOVERNANCE



SCHOOL REOPENING TOOLKIT: GOVERNANCE

This toolkit is intended to highlight those areas most closely related to governance questions, considerations, and needs in our districts. The guidelines provided here are intended to assist in making reopening decisions. It is important to consider the specific needs of local communities in the use of this optional guidance and the department encourages thoughtful conversations on what this could mean for each of your stakeholders.

All information in the document is non-regulatory guidance issued for general informational purposes only. This document is not intended to constitute legal advice. Because local school board policy and unique facts make dramatic differences in analyzing any situation, the Tennessee Department of Education advises each school district to consult with the local school board attorney for specific legal advice regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school operations.

II. Checklist

Preparation

Review information provided to your board

The Tennessee School Board Association (TSBA) released guidance on June 5th to their members. It is important for superintendents to always be prepared for potential questions that their boards may ask as well as anticipate requests from the board. The guidance can be viewed [here](#).

Role of the board in preparation for the 2020-21 school year

COVID-19 created a crisis that requires leadership and management by the superintendent, district staff and principals. It did not create a crisis in the way school boards operate. Moving forward, the board can be helpful in focusing with the superintendent on:

- Facilitating Additional School Board Meetings (as necessary, to address district needs)
- School Re-opening Policies
- Instructional Models for 2020-21
- Budget Considerations (which specifically includes personnel)

It will also be important to take the time with the board to reflect on lessons learned during the initial closure period (communications and operations) and delivery of instruction can help inform priorities moving forward.

Determine delegated decision-making authority (if any)

With priorities established and the quick pace of preparing for school re-opening, a superintendent should be on the same page with their board on what decisions they will sign-off on versus delegating authority to the superintendent to make decisions in real time in the best interest of the district.

A superintendent should prepare a list of potential decisions or requested authority over items like personnel and procurement for their board to review and consider.

Return to School Committee

Establish a Return to School Committee

The Return to School Committee should focus on the three critical areas that the school board should prioritize:

- School Re-opening Policies
- Instructional Models for 2020-21
- Budget Considerations (which specifically includes personnel)

Each of these areas can be made into a taskforce consisting of any of the following individuals: central office staff, principals, teachers, families and students as well as any relevant stakeholder with expertise in the respective areas (i.e. health official, business leader, etc.).

With each school board typically already having subcommittees in place, it may make sense to have each taskforce report their findings, through the superintendent, through this channel. The subcommittee approach may also eliminate the need to have a board member on each taskforce, as the results of planning will be reported to them on a regular basis.

Taskforce 1: School Reopening

Meet with key stakeholders

It is vital to engage all stakeholders to hear their concerns and expectations for school re-opening. The taskforce, which is already made up of diverse perspectives, should ensure they are engaging local health officials, parent teacher association, teachers' association, student government, principals, etc.

Ensuring stakeholders have an active voice while also becoming acutely aware of their needs will allow the school board and taskforce to ensure they are effectively meeting the needs of those they are here to serve. This engagement will also help with effectively prioritizing agendas and topics moving forward for this taskforce.

Review available TDOE re-opening toolkits

The taskforce should review the following TDOE school re-opening toolkits to inform their recommendations:

- Transportation
- Social Distancing at Schools
- Safety and Operations
- Nutrition
- Health and Public Health
- Wellbeing and Mental Health
- Communications
- Policy and Legal Considerations

Finalize school calendar

An immediate need of a school community is to know if there will be any changes to the first day of school. In addition, any potential plans for extending hours of instruction, shifts to the daily schedule, addition or changes to instructional days, elimination of breaks, or extra-curricular or extended programming need to be conveyed quickly to the school community.

Select scenario to open school year

The Instructional Model taskforce will determine plans for how instruction will be delivered in multiple scenarios. However, it is important for this School Reopening taskforce to determine a recommendation for how the school year will open, which determines which instructional model will be in place to begin the year.

Develop closure protocols and pandemic response

Regardless of which scenario your district picks to open the school year, it must develop closure protocols and pandemic response processes in case positive cases are identified within the school or there is a high level of community transmission. In following the Safety and Operations toolkit, the taskforce should put a plan in place that complies with CDC and local health officials' guidance.

Building utilization

After reviewing the Social Distancing in Schools toolkit, each school building will need to act with precaution and comply with CDC and local health officials' guidance. The taskforce should have a plan in place for each school building to ensure efficient building utilization.

This also includes determining when in person instruction resumes, what requirements will be made and how CDC and local health officials' guidance will be followed by students, teachers, staff and visitors regarding:

- Wearing of cloth face coverings
- Disabling of water fountains

- Use of hand sanitizer
- Social distancing protocols (classroom, assemblies, lunch, signage, passing in between classes, etc.)
- Movement throughout the building (lunchroom, hallways, bathrooms and classrooms)

Transportation

After reviewing the Transportation toolkit, make recommendations for efficiently and safely transporting students to school. Any shifts in transportation should make sure to align with the taskforce's recommendations listed in finalizing the school calendar. It is important that any potential changes to daily schedules will be supported by the transportation required to get students to school safely.

Taskforce 2: Instructional Models for 2020-21

Review TDOE's Academics school re-opening toolkit

This taskforce's primary function is to be prepared for all students learning from home, hybrid approach (in-person and at-home learning) and in-person learning. As districts learned last school year that their situation could change in a blink of an eye, it is now more important than ever to be prepared for whatever 2020-21 will bring.

Wellbeing and mental health of students and staff

As we prepare for the new instructional year, we know our students and staff will have mental health and wellbeing needs that need to be addressed. This taskforce should review the Wellbeing and Mental Health toolkit to make recommendations for their students and staff. We believe in educating the whole child. We will be unable to do that if staff needs are not met, and we will work together to address trauma our students may have experienced during this pandemic.

Inventory of teachers and students' access to technology devices and internet

In order to prepare for various scenarios for the 2020-21 school year, it is vital that each school is well aware of what access or lack thereof their teachers and students have to technology devices and internet. If students will be learning at home for any part of 2020-21 school year, a district will need to make plans for how to serve groups of students and teachers who may lack internet. It is important to dive deeper into access issues. For example, does an adult or older sibling use the device during the day or are there not enough devices for the whole family, etc.

This information will also be useful for the Budget Considerations taskforce as they determine if they will recommend spending funds to purchase additional devices or internet access for their district.

Plan for all students

A school board holds the superintendent responsible for driving academic outcomes for all students. This taskforce should ensure within each potential instructional model how all students will be served. This includes students with disabilities, gifted, English language learners, those with access to devices and the internet and those who do not have access (as referenced above as part of the inventory checklist). The Equitable Access and Opportunity school re-opening toolkit for recommended best practices should be reviewed.

Plan for all teachers

With the recommendations of scenarios of instructional models for how all students will be served finalized, it is vital to now address the professional development and planning needs of our teachers. This taskforce should ensure that the proper support is in place for their teachers as they prepare for the 2020-21 school year. This taskforce should review the Staffing school reopening toolkit to review available opportunities for leaders and teachers within the digital learning space.

Taskforce 3: Budget Considerations

Budget Analysis and Report for the Board

As you close out FY20 and prepare for FY21, it is important for a superintendent and their budget director to fully prepare for their board, budget considerations that realize all available federal and state resources. This information should support your board in determining priorities and making any budget asks, as needed.

CARES grant application

Based on the budget analysis as well as recommendations from the other two taskforces, the CARES grant application should be drafted or revised to reflect emerging needs.

Rainy day funds

If a district has a surplus in its fund balance, the taskforce should consider making recommendations to use rainy day funds. These funds could supplement initiatives funded by the CARES grant or cover ineligible expenses and are best suited to address one-time costs.

III. Best Practices

Governance and Management

Communicating to stakeholders

The school board is elected by the community and represents their voices. With the recommendations of each taskforce going to the board for consideration, it is vital for the superintendent and school board to speak with one voice to the broader school community.

During the pandemic closures, both superintendents and school boards may have witnessed grace from some community members recognizing the unprecedented nature of the situation, while they may have also experienced anxiety from other community members due to the various, difficult challenges faced by so many.

As we move towards the 2020-21 school year, there should be time for planning effective communications and responding to questions and needs as they arise. The Communications school-reopening toolkit is recommended for review.

Institute regular meeting schedule

With multiple taskforces taking place as well as social distancing precautions, board members and the superintendent should consider hosting special community meetings to update progress as well as allow for multiple modes of community input.

At a bare minimum, ensuring that regularly schedule board meetings continue whether in person or virtually (while executive order is still in place) ensure consistency that is needed during these unprecedented times.

Seek waivers

Based on the recommendations of the taskforce, the school board and superintendent may need to seek waivers from the State Board of Education or the Department of Education. The Policy and Legal considerations toolkit should be reviewed prior to waiver requests being made.

IV. Recommended Schedules and Procedures

Governance and Management

Potential procedures for the taskforces are as follows:

Operating Procedures*

All taskforces should consider at least one stakeholder from the following groups:

1. Local health officials
2. Parent teacher association (or similar)
3. Teachers
4. Principal(s)
5. Student government or representation
6. District leadership
7. Board member (although taskforce could report to already established school board subcommittees)

At the first meeting, each taskforce should select a chair, review the responsibilities of the taskforce as authorized by the school board and/or superintendent, and determine deliverables. Taskforces will make recommendations to the superintendent to provide to the school board.

Taskforce Roles

- **Taskforce Chair:** The Chair will create the agenda, facilitate the meeting, review written minutes, and report to the superintendent.
- **Taskforce Secretary:** The Secretary will take notes and provide written minutes to the Chair of each taskforce
- **Taskforce Members:** Committee members should be present and participate in meetings, provide agenda suggestions, and vote on recommendations.
- **The Superintendent:** The Superintendent should support each taskforce. The Superintendent may participate in all taskforce meetings.

Committee Agendas /Minutes

Each agenda item will be assigned to a specific person who will present the item and provide informational materials. The person addressing an agenda item may be a taskforce member or a person invited to address a specific topic.

V. Resource List

Governance and Management

National School Board Association: COVID-19: Preparing For Widespread Illness in Your School Community

<https://www.nsba.org/Resources/coronavirus/legal-guide>

How School Boards Should Respond to Coronavirus

https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2020/04/how_school_boards_should_respond_to_coronavirus.html

How are School Boards Responding to School Closures in the Time of COVID-19?

<https://xqsuperschool.org/blog/school-board/school-boards-school-closures-covid-19-coronavirus/>

Coronavirus has upended traditional school board meetings — and put transparency to the test

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/3/21225421/coronavirus-has-upended-traditional-school-board-meetings-and-put-transparency-to-the-test>

Return to School Road Map - Governance

<https://returntoschoolroadmap.org/governance/district/>

Potential Procedures for Taskforce adapted from RSU16 Subcommittee Guidance*

<https://www.rsu16.org/boe/subcommittees/>

The Role of the School Board in Responding to the Coronavirus

<https://www.tasb.org/trustees/expand-your-knowledge/stay-informed/feature-stories/leadership-and-governance/the-role-of-the-school-board-in-responding-to-the-coronavirus.aspx>

Tennessee Department of Education Covid-19 Resource Page

<https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>

TDOE and Trevecca Digital Learning and Teaching Series

<https://www.trevecca.edu/landing-page/professional-development-tools-for-remote-teaching-and-learning>

Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

COVID-19 or Other Public Health Emergencies and the FMLA

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/pandemic>

CDC COVID-19 Considerations for Schools

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

CDC guidance for employers and workplaces on COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>

EEOC and ADA Pandemic Guidance

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>