

Principles For Reopening



This document reflects NEA-New Hampshire's values regarding the safe reopening of our schools. Individual locals reserve the right to add to, delete from and further modify the steps outlined in the document. To the extent this document conflicts with any local collective bargaining agreement, the local collective bargaining agreement controls.

Background and Context

In the same way that New Hampshire is taking a deliberate and careful approach to reopening the economy, the state must take an equally deliberate and careful approach to reopening our public schools.

NEA-NH believes that remote instruction is necessary during the COVID-19 crisis as a temporary response that protects the health and safety of our students, members and their families. We know that remote learning can never replace the experience and opportunities provided by our neighborhood schools. We strongly support the return to our schools and classrooms as soon as it is safe to do so.

We believe remote instruction should be used

- in the absence of a safe school environment;
- while the first steps outlined in this document are implemented;
- if it is found that a safe school environment cannot be established;
- if local health conditions change in such a way that requires school be closed.

Having spent approximately 25 percent of the 2019-2020 school year in crisis mode learning remotely, all of our students — regardless of socioeconomic status— will be returning from summer break having experienced social, emotional and academic needs that we don't yet fully understand but must be addressed. Our schools cannot open with the conditions under which they operated before COVID-19 or we will fail our students, families, educators and communities at a time of great need. This moment provides us with exciting opportunities to transform public education to adapt to our new reality.

Educators will need to develop new skills, strategies, teaching methodologies, and curricula that match the conditions to which they will be returning regardless of the reopening model (remote, in-person, or hybrid). Students and their families have ongoing needs that must be met — before and upon return to school. School buildings across New Hampshire are not yet equipped to meet the necessary environmental health and safety standards. To be ready for

students and staff members to return, we need time to prepare buildings and physical settings, plan and learn new skills, and welcome and acclimate our students and their families. These measures require full staffing and funding to address the myriad facets of teaching and learning during a global pandemic.

Local associations and local districts must work collaboratively to develop and implement a plan that best addresses their local contexts — be it remote, hybrid or full return which includes appropriate health and safety protections. The plan must include contingencies if the local situation changes. The mandates outlined below delineate the minimum standards NEA-NH believes local associations and districts must include when establishing any reopening plan.

The Importance of Communication

This local plan is a living document, the goal of which is to provide a vehicle for ongoing partnership and collaboration with staff and their exclusive representative, families, communities, and students. The committee structure to author such a plan already exists through the Joint Loss Management Committee required by NH RSA 281-A:64 and NH Lab Rule 600. Each school district shall immediately either establish this committee, or refocus the current committee, in order to immediately provide opportunities for regular communication about planning for reopening. To the extent School Boards wish to send a representative to the committee, they should do so in order to streamline information between employees and the Board.

These committees do not supplant the requirements of RSA 273-A to bargain with the union. Rather, these committees serve to have a broader dialogue for the entire school community. Out of these conversations may come proposals which need to be bargained with a local union. NEA-NH believes that when exclusive representatives are involved in the early phases of policy planning in these committees, subsequent bargaining resulting from such conversations will be straightforward.

We believe to be safe, any plan that includes any amount of in-person instruction in a school building needs to follow these steps before beginning such instruction or allowing staff and students into a school building:

Step #1 Full Staffing and Full Funding Prior to Reopening

1. Reopening safely requires additional money and staff: smaller classes, more bus capacity to enable physical distancing, more nurses and counselors and Education Support Professionals to address student needs. It also requires an unwavering commitment to supply students and all employees with the appropriate PPE and following health and safety protocols.
2. The state shall reimburse each district for all necessary PPE, physical materials, and other resources necessary for safe reopening in a timely manner.
3. All necessary custodial staff will be hired to adhere to Environmental Protection Agency cleaning standards in every school. Custodial staff will be trained as necessary to implement the standards. Staff not otherwise tasked with custodial duties shall not be required to assume these duties.
4. Each school will have at least one nurse with all necessary PPE, high quality thermometers, testing supplies, and any other medical equipment necessary to serve as the school's only medical professional. And as the only medical professional in the building, once schools are reopened, the Nurse's medical judgment will be respected and granted final authority on all medical decisions.
5. Prior to the first day of school, each school will have a thorough air quality evaluation and the report will be shared with all employees. Schools with HVAC systems that do not meet American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning standards are considered unsafe and shall not be occupied by students or staff. Ongoing air quality evaluations will be performed to assure continued compliance. All evaluation results shall be shared with employees.

Step #2 Phased Reopening

Phase 1 of Reopening: The first phase is to be used by teachers, Education Support Professionals, substitutes and all other relevant school personnel to have uninterrupted time together to prepare for the return of students and resumption of school in whatever model the local association and district deem best

through negotiations. NEA NH supports at least three (3) days expanded professional development for these purposes.

This time will be used for activities including, but not limited to,

- setting up in-person or virtual classrooms and other spaces;
- training on the health and safety protocols;
- making time for professional development and curriculum development;
- preparing for Phases 2 and 3 — the Social Emotional Learning (SEL), academic learning and possible hybrid remote education that will be fundamental to the first six weeks of school when students return.

Phase 2 of Reopening: The second phase is for educators to meet students and families either in person or remotely, as the public health context allows. This time will be used for activities including but not limited to meeting with families and students and preparing them for the new health and safety protocols, including physical distancing and mask wearing. The time frame for this phase should be long enough to complete this work, we recommend 2-4 days. This time should be used for:

- social emotional wellness checks;
- basic needs assessments
- an evaluation of technology needs, and,
- reconnecting with students, families, and school communities.

Phase 3 of Reopening: The third phase is the resumption of instruction/learning, whether in person, remote, or hybrid, focusing on the first six weeks of learning. The first six weeks of learning will not necessarily begin on the scheduled first day of school. During this time, educators and students will:

- build their relationships with each other;
- establishing their learning community and school climate and culture.

During this time, expectations and rules will be set, new structures and routines will be learned, and the groundwork will be laid for Social Emotional Learning and academic learning throughout the year. We must build school culture and embark on SEL in the manner that it was intended.

Curriculum and instruction decisions shall be informed by what students need and by what engages them. These decisions must be made by the educators closest to the students and when appropriate, specifically in consultation with paraprofessionals or specialists who work with the student.

Phase 4 of Reopening: The fourth phase will be based on an assessment of public health data and educational progress under the initial reopening plan. This assessment will be led by the joint loss management committee, and will seek input from students, parents and the community. It should take place six to eight weeks after the start of school. Based on this assessment, local associations and districts will determine their next steps, if any such as continue with the initial plan or make modifications. Any modification in a revised agreement must be negotiated between the exclusive representative and district.

Step #3 Assuring Student and Staff Health & Safety

Health and Safety Agreements which address staff health and safety should be negotiated in every school district with the exclusive representative for staff. Without health and safety assurances, schools are not safe for staff to return to in-person teaching. Consideration shall include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): The state will survey local districts for their personal protective equipment needs and will purchase and distribute PPE to all districts according to needs that will be ongoing throughout the school year. Special consideration must be given to special needs populations including, for example, clear masks for the deaf and hard of hearing and gloves and gowns for educators whose responsibilities include diapering and toileting of students.
2. The state will apply all relevant science-based guidelines and NH Department of Labor requirements to ensure the greatest possible safety, both for students and their families and educators and their families. These requirements will always include physical distancing of at least six feet and face coverings for all in classrooms and in other group settings. Face coverings, including masks or shields, must be made available to students and staff and be worn in accordance with established protocols.
3. As a condition of reopening, all districts must evaluate and, if necessary, upgrade or repair their windows and HVAC systems to provide for proper air exchange, filtration and climate control in compliance with American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning standards to ensure the safety of students and educators.
4. All districts must establish baseline protocols for daily maintenance and cleaning that meet the standards of the Environmental Protection Agency. Such maintenance is expected to be performed

multiple times each day.

5. All districts must have protocols for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases, including establishing isolation rooms, testing, reporting, contact tracing, and paid leave for employees who are advised to quarantine

Step #4 Modifications/Waivers on State Regulations related to:

1. Time on learning regulatory requirements for 180 days and 945/990 hours.
2. Extending timelines for advancing or renewing current licenses based on barriers to educators' ability to engage in professional learning opportunities, take or pass tests required by the NH DOE for licensure, and/or to meet other coursework or program requirements.
3. The Governor shall grant educators the same benefit he granted first responders with regard to workers compensation benefits. Notwithstanding the provisions of RSA 281-A:2, XI and XIII, 16 and 27, in any proceeding before the New Hampshire Department of Labor or the administratively attached Compensation Appeals Board, there shall exist a prima facie presumption that the all educator's COVID-19 exposure and infection were occupationally related. See Governor's Emergency Order #36, April 24, 2020

Step #5 Staff Assignments/Workload, Including Alternative Teaching/Learning Arrangements for Educators and/or Students

1. There should be recognition that there will be a need for some educators to provide remote instruction and some other educators to provide in-person instruction.
2. However, in accordance with the Department of Education reopening guidance, as a rule, educators should be primarily or exclusively remote OR primarily or exclusively in-person, but NOT both.
3. Educators prioritized for remote instruction should include those in at-risk categories or who have household members in at-risk categories, as well as those with pressing childcare responsibilities; districts should consider mitigating childcare issues by coordinating teaching and learning schedules with employee's childcare limitations.
4. If alternative work arrangements are not possible for at-risk educators, they must be offered other work opportunities, for example, professional development.

5. Students in at-risk categories or who have household members in at-risk categories shall be provided alternative learning arrangements, including remote learning, for example.

Step #6 Computers and Internet Access for All

1. All students and staff, including paraprofessionals, must have access to appropriate technology, provided by the state or the district, to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.
2. All students and educators, including paraprofessionals, must have access to reliable and adequate internet service. If they do not have this access, the state or the district shall provide it or assist in procuring it.
3. Districts must provide support to students, families, and staff to set up and use technology. Support and training should be available in languages other than English that reflect the family populations of the districts.
4. It must be recognized that learning or instructing while at home carries with it incidental risk of other household members viewing or overhearing school activities. District's should make parents aware of this fact through waivers or notices.
5. It is unacceptable to ask educators to use their own personal electronic equipment such as cell phones and laptops to perform job duties assigned by their employer.