QUICK FACTS

COVID-19: Key Questions to Ask Before Schools Reopen

School districts across New Jersey are making plans for reopening schools in the summer and for the 2020-21 school year. "The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education" released by the New Jersey Department of Education indicates that diverse parents, students, and community members should be actively involved in developing these plans.

To guide these discussions and to ensure that various needs of families and students are taken into consideration, here are key questions you may want to ask district leaders about school reopening.

School Operations:

- Where can I find information about school district policies and procedures for school reopening?

- How will the district implement appropriate social distancing and/or face coverings to ensure the health and safety of students and staff?

- How will the district implement enhanced cleaning and disinfection of school transportation vehicles and school buildings?

- How will school ensure the safe distribution of breakfast and lunch?

- In the event of a blended/hybrid approach to schooling, how will food services effectively switch between in-school and remote learning?

- How will the monitoring of the implementation of safety protocols be conducted?

- How will the school district ensure that the implementation of physical distancing (e.g. dividers or partitions) does not become another form of restraint and seclusion?

- How will the school district promote compliance with safety and social distancing protocols through a sense of community responsibility rather than through punitive measures? How will violations be handled?

- Will ongoing educational training be provided to students, staff, and their families on safety precautions, safe interactions, and current health guidelines?

- How will students and staff be checked for symptoms of COVID-19? Will there be on-site COVID-19 testing?

- What is the plan if a student, student's family member, or district staff member becomes directly impacted by COVID-19?

- Would the school district be providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to students and staff?

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- Will wearing masks by students and staff be mandated to protect the health and safety of all? What if my child cannot wear a mask for a long period of time?

- What would school day look like for students next school year in terms of student schedules, including bus schedules, class size, class changes, lunch, before and after school activities and clubs, tutoring, and sports?

- How would school transportation services be provided in accordance with health and safety standards?

- Could parents who choose to transport their children to and from school due to health concerns be able to get reimbursed by the district for mileage?

- Will the school appoint a designated staff person, who is COVID-19 point of contact, responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns from staff and families?

- What is the school district policy for return-to-school after COVID-19 illness?

- How will privacy and confidentiality be ensured if a student, staff, or members of their immediate family become sick with COVID-19 symptoms, test positive for COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms?

- Will hand-washing or hand sanitizing stations be installed in each classroom and areas used by students and staff?

- What remote learning opportunities and resources will be provided to students with medical complications who are unavailable for face-to-face learning to ensure education equity?

- How will students who are quarantined receive education?

- How will the school attendance and discipline policies be impacted?

- How does the school district plan to provide educational programs for all students during the regular school day, as well as before and after school programs?

- What will a typical school day look like?

Academic Recovery:

- How will the district be reassessing all students when schools resume to determine their learning needs and provide individualized instruction?

- What professional development will be provided to teachers in online platforms and using tech tools to support remote instruction?

- How will the school district ensure that educators have timely access to student performance data and professional learning opportunities so they can effectively provide personalized learning and track student progress?

- What happens if parents do not feel comfortable with their student attending school in-person? Will the instruction be provided in an alternate format? What will it look like?

- How will compensatory services/extended school year services be determined for students with disabilities and when that will happen?

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- Will the district be providing summer learning opportunities for all students?

- What will the Extended School Year services look like for my child with disabilities?

- Will the district consider offering more in-person learning opportunities for young children, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, homeless and migrant students, students in foster care, and economically disadvantaged students whose needs are more intense and who have been disproportionally impacted by the extended school closures?

- How will students receive a well-rounded education, including fine arts, music, physical education, and extracurricular activities, despite social distance restrictions?

- Have you considered how requiring educators to wear masks, if mandated, will impact students' ability to hear and understand instruction, particularly for early readers, English language learners, and students with disabilities?

Social-Emotional and Health Supports:

- How will the school district be assessing mental health needs of students and staff before beginning the instruction and throughout the school year?

- Will mental and emotional support related to loss, grief, stress, anxiety, and trauma be provided to students and staff?

- How will the school district identify ongoing needs for social services, academic supports, and supplemental assistance needs of students and their families and provide supports and resources essential for student success?

- How will the school district help students, especially students who are new to the school, feel welcome, safe, comfortable, and alleviate their fears?

- What options are available for families of children with medical complications that may prevent them from returning to school for in-person instruction?

- How will the school district incorporate movement activities at regular intervals throughout the day to promote student and staff health and wellness?

- What will trauma-informed school culture and wrap-around supports look like in each school building?

- How will additional COVID-19 related support protocols be integrated and individualized in my child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

Remote Learning and Family Engagement:

- What specific tools, virtual platforms, and communication channels will be used to establish and maintain ongoing staff-student-parent collaboration?

- What instructional resources will be provided to families to facilitate learning at home, for example, textbooks, learning plans, and school supplies?

- Will my child be provided with an Internet service/ hotspot and a 1:1 computer/electronic device at no cost to enable remote learning?
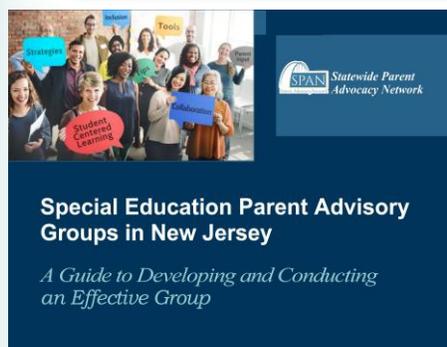
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- What ongoing training and support will be provided to parents/caregivers and other family members to effectively support learning of their children at home, including online tutorials and access to educators who can assist them?

- What supports will be provided to non-English speaking families? How does the district plan to communicate with families who do not speak English?

- Will digital literacy instruction and resources on how to use distance learning programs be available for families and in multiple languages?

- What conditions will prompt physical school buildings to close again and how learning will continue? How will these conditions be communicated to families so they can be prepared?

- How will the school district provide clear and frequent communication to families so that they have the most up-to-date information related to student schedule, instruction, progress monitoring or any information related to COVID-19?

- How will the school district ensure that the voices of students and their families are reflected in priorities and solutions outlined in school policies, procedures, and programs for school reopening and closures?

- Will the in-person parent meetings, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) conferences or Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) meetings, be permitted?

- Will family learning centers located in the school buildings be open to provide parent education, training, socialization, and networking opportunities?

- To what extent, school district-based, parent-led organizations like SEPAGs, PTOs/PTAs, Parents as Champions for Healthy Schools Teams, be able to continue to meet in schools?

- How will schools make information available to all families, regardless of Internet access, languages spoken in the community, or accessible formats, about school reopening/closures and changes impacting student learning?

- How will student, family, and community voices be included in the assessment process to determine the needs and assets related to academics, physical and mental health, social-emotional, technology, and socioeconomic conditions for student success?

The START-EPSD Project would like to thank all families and SEPAG members for their contributions toward the development of this quick reference guide.

Special Education Parent Advisory Groups in New Jersey

A Guide to Developing and Conducting an Effective Group

For a complete guide to starting and supporting a SEPAG in your school, district or community, visit the START-EPSD Project web-page (bit.ly/startepsd) and/or connect with a Parent Group Specialist in your region.

Access the SEPAG Guide: tiny.cc/SEPAGguideEnglish

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