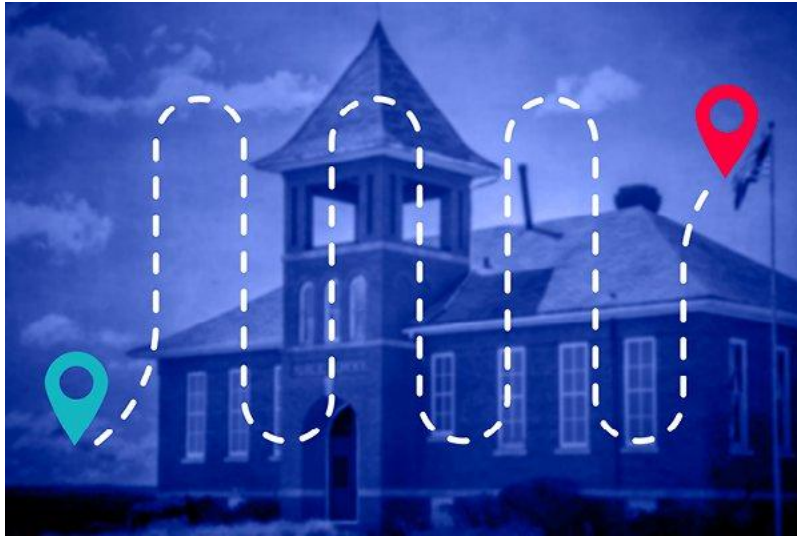


COVID-19: Report Offers 'Blueprint' for Reopening Schools and Beyond

By [Ewie Blad](#) on [May 4, 2020, 12:01 AM](#)

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As schools reopen in the fall, they should have clear procedures for closing again if the coronavirus re-emerges in their area, a new report says. And they should be prepared to cooperate with local health authorities to track factors like student absenteeism, fevers, and family health conditions to help trace the path of the pandemic and stop its spread.

The "**Blueprint for Back to School**," released Monday by the American Enterprise Institute, says state and federal leaders should also be prepared for another atypical school year, quickly providing regulatory flexibility around issues like seat time, graduation requirements and procurement rules to allow schools to continue operations in unpredictable circumstances.

And, because a coronavirus vaccine may not be available for at least 18 months, schools' reopening plans should also prepare for chaos in the 2021-22 academic year, the report warns.

"We understand the enormity of these burdens," the report says. "This is a moment when all of us—educators, families, and communities—must find ways to ensure that children get back to the schools and connections so important to their young lives. When schools get the green light to go, they must be ready. That work starts now."

As nearly every state in the country **closed its schools** for the remainder of the school year, the right-leaning think tank worked with former state education chiefs, federal policymakers, superintendents, and charter school network leaders to make recommendations on how and when those buildings should reopen.

The blueprint was coauthored by AEI visiting fellow John Bailey, a former policy aide in the George W. Bush White House, and Frederick M. Hess, director of education policy studies, who also writes **an opinion blog for Education Week**. It builds on some underlying assumptions:

- Schools will remain closed until the 2020-21 school year with potential two- to four-week rolling closures after classes start to resume to prevent a spread of the virus.
- Reopened schools will work with local health officials to take new precautionary measures, like physical distancing in classrooms, staggered arrival and departure times, and student temperature checks to screen for illness.
- One in five teachers and one in four principals are over 55, which means they are at higher risk from the virus and in greater need of accommodations to protect their health. Others with underlying conditions may also need such accommodations. [See **a separate analysis of this issue here**.]
- Policymakers and educators need to think long-term, preparing for possible changes to operations for the next two academic years.

When to Reopen

The plan links to existing guidance on when schools should reopen and when they should consider closing, compiling documents from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a previous report from AEI, and the White House.

The **White House guidelines** include "gating" criteria to govern reopening, like consistently 14 consecutive days of declining rates of new symptoms and documented cases of the coronavirus, and adequate hospital capacity. The guidelines call for three phases of reopening: first, businesses, schools, and workplaces, with school buildings that have been shut down remaining closed in the first phase. That means schools would have to see 28 days of declining virus rates for schools to reopen, and even then, they would have to take some extra precautions.

would have to see 20 days of declining virus rates for schools to reopen, and even then, they would have to take some extra precautions. Governors, who **ultimately make decisions about closures**, should consult education leaders and the public in those decisions, the AP urges. And school reopening should be considered in the context of greater easing of virus mitigation efforts so that it makes sense a relaxed rules for businesses and other organizations.

Because the closure decisions are ultimately out of schools' hands, states should help pay for the fallout, providing resources to help continue instruction, the report says. That urging comes as states project dramatic drops in revenue and schools brace for accompanying budget cuts.

Coordinating With Health Officials

Schools should plan to work with local health officials to help trace the path of the virus and determine which teachers and students need to be isolated or tested, the report says.

"Schools should also prepare for possible reporting of other health indicators, such as student absenteeism, students who present a fever, or students whose parents or guardians have been diagnosed with COVID-19," it recommends.

Those protocols should be clearly communicated to the public with student privacy in mind, it says, urging more federal guidance on privacy laws and coordination between agencies. [Read about March guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on the **coronavirus and student privacy**.]

Meeting New Needs

Schools should use the lessons they learned through remote learning in the spring to prepare for possible future uses when they resume in the fall, the report says, even completing drills to prepare for sudden shifts to remote learning. And those plans should accommodate students' various needs, like English-language learners and students with disabilities, to ensure equity.

Education leaders need to create plans to assess students' learning loss, the report says. It suggests administering canceled spring tests in the current school year in the fall to gauge students' needs. And it urges the continuation of state testing next school year.

Schools should also prepare for logistical challenges in areas like transportation, meal service, and operations to accommodate new social distancing protocols, the report says. And they should be prepared to face new social and emotional needs students may face after extended time away, even considering one-on-one screenings to measure the effects.

The report has specific recommendations for a range of other issues, including staffing, attendance, and academic supports. You can **complete Blueprint for Back to School here**.

Contributors to the recommendations include former District of Columbia schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson; Carrie Conaway, a lecturer at Harvard Graduate School of Education and former chief strategy and research officer at the Massachusetts education department; former Kentucky Education Commissioner Wayne D. Lewis Jr.; former New Mexico Education Secretary Hanna Skandera; Nina Rees, the president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools; and former Louisiana State Superintendent John White.

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myersbo1 • a day ago

Challenging times present many opportunities. Collaboration will be the key. The mission to return students to physical classrooms \ multiple partners working with one agenda. Bo

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