south dakota
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Learning. Leadership. Service.

This document is designed to assist South Dakota schools as they plan for the fall of the 2020-21 school year. The challenge of reopening school buildings will require an unprecedented level of preparation, coordination, and communication.

It is organized around the following key areas:

- Guiding Principles
- Decision Guides
- Working with the South Dakota Department of Health
- Policy and Funding

Plans for returning to school should be built to be flexible – adaptable to changing local conditions. School leaders should develop plans in concert with local government and state health officials, using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the South Dakota Department of Health as key resources to inform their decision making. See links in the Resources section below.

Finally, school leaders should plan to communicate with all stakeholders – staff, students, families, and communities – so they have a clear understanding of safety protocols and expectations for learning.

# Guiding Principles

**SD DOE maintains the below assumptions:**

- Schools will provide instruction in the fall and throughout the 2020-21 school year, with a priority placed on face-to-face instruction.
- COVID-19 will continue to spread, with or without a vaccine, through the next school year.
- Schools can take practical steps to mitigate spread of the virus while continuing to focus on student learning.
- Each district will make decisions based on scientific information at the time, current status of virus spread in and around the school community, and best interests of staff, students, and families.
- This document does not constitute a legal guide.

**Decision-making should be based on what we know to be true about COVID-19, knowing that our understanding of the virus will continue to evolve:**

- The rate of infection and the mortality rate of COVID-19 is higher than that of influenza.
- There are no known reliable therapeutics or vaccines for COVID-19.
- These two factors combine to necessitate mitigation strategies beyond what a school would put in place for seasonal influenza.
- Asymptomatic individuals are infectious, though not to the same degree as those displaying symptoms.
- Children are carriers and are susceptible to the virus. Yet there are different levels of susceptibility throughout the population.
- Measures such as social distancing and masks in confined spaces help reduce transmission.

**SD DOE expectations for schools**:

- Schools will continue to be a safe environment for students, focusing on both social-emotional and physical health. Local decisions will be rooted in what is best for students.
- Schools will take reasonable steps within the context of COVID-19 spread in the community to protect the school community. National guidelines, while helpful to provide a context, are only a guide. SD DOE expects school leaders to make reasoned judgments to limit the spread but still provide for continuity of learning, focusing on face-to-face delivery models whenever possible.
- Every student will have the opportunity to engage in a full year of learning, irrespective of the spread of COVID-19 in a community.
- School leaders will work transparently with their school boards, staff, and community to communicate decisions and the underlying assumptions guiding those decisions.
- School leaders will need to make difficult decisions to ensure the health – both mental and physical – of their entire school community.

# Decision Guides

### *Can we physically open our school buildings to students and staff next fall?*

1. Using the data sources, including data on the SD DOH website on levels of community spread and trend data, and other relevant data pieces provided by the SD DOH to district leaders, evaluate the spread and risks associated with COVID-19 in the relevant geographic area of the district and/or school.
2. Is your community under local ordinances limiting business operations and gatherings?
3. Do you have a high percentage of your staff at higher risk and/or unable to be in the building to teach and provide services in person?
4. Can you build in time within the day to accommodate additional restroom breaks for handwashing and sanitizing of shared surfaces?
5. Are there sufficient childcare resources in the community if you do *not* open school?
6. Have you reviewed the SD DOH Guidance for Close Contact Businesses to evaluate your readiness?

**Answer**: Using the SD DOH COVID-19 Mitigation in Schools and CDC guidance *as a tool*, combined with local considerations, determine how you will open the school to students and teachers. If it seems appropriate to physically open, proceed with other parts of the guide.

### *Are your facilities ready?*

1. Have appropriate safety inspections, including water quality, been conducted in accordance with state statute, regulation, and CDC guidelines for buildings that have been unoccupied for long periods of time?
2. Are sufficient inventories of cleaning supplies and procedures in accordance with the school's opening plans (see below) in place?
3. Will additional protective devices for personnel be necessary to procure prior to opening? (See below; for example, plexiglass for reception areas, cafeteria cashiers, and other high traffic/high contact areas).
4. Are you able to replace touch equipment with touchless (for example, PIN pads used in the cafeteria, automatic soap dispensers, paper towel dispensers, hand dryers, etc.)?
5. Have you developed a protocol for bus transportation and drop-off/pick-up of students? (See below regarding transportation).

**Answer:** Inspection checks will be important in school facilities that have been vacant since spring. Additionally, consider supplies the district will need and build those costs into your CARES Act ESSER application.

### *Will we need to plan for flex delivery methods from the outset?*

1. Using the data sources, including data on the SD DOH website on levels of community spread and trend data, the SD DOH COVID-19 Mitigation in Schools, and other relevant data pieces provided by the SD DOH to district leaders, evaluate the spread and risks associated with COVID-19 in the relevant geographic area of the district and/or school.
2. Will you have a large percentage of parents opting out of in-person instruction, whether permitted by district policy or not?
3. Has your staff received appropriate training to accommodate virtual and in-person instruction?
4. Do you have a district policy in place that allows for long-term remote learning as an enrollment option?

**Answer**: Using the resources linked at the end of this guide, including the SD DOH Reopening Schools Checklist and the SD DOH COVID-19 Mitigation in Schools *as a tool*, it is reasonable, and recommended, to work with your teaching staff to develop plans for blended delivery methods at the start of the 2020-21 school year. In doing so, you may consider:

- Surveying parents and caregivers to understand their expectations and concerns with regard to sending their children back to physical classrooms.
- Communicating district policies regarding instruction in the classroom vs. remote learning.
- Setting transparent standards for maintaining enrollment under remote learning. Can the district accommodate "opt outs" from physical classrooms? If so, what criteria will you set for opt-outs (for example, the student lives with a parent who is considered at high risk for the virus? How will educators unable to return to the classroom continue instruction)?
- Adapting the school meal program to continue providing healthy meals daily (or feeding high risk students).

*NOTE: Whether a district is able to accommodate long-term remote learning and instruction in the classroom, in parallel throughout the year, is a local decision. Districts are encouraged to determine to what extent, if any, such parallel instruction can be accommodated and communicate that policy to parents and the community. Districts are further encouraged to set policies that, to the extent practical, provide for stability in the learning environment when allowing for long-term remote learning.*

*Please also note that students participating in remote learning, still under the instruction of the school district directly or through SDVS, are not "home school" students. Families wishing to withdraw students from the supervision of the district should complete a Certificate of Alternative Instruction, with full understanding of the implications of doing such, including on participation in activities.*

### *Will we need to plan for remote learning with buildings closed to staff and students?*

**Answer**: Yes. Regardless of other factors that currently exist, SD DOE recommends districts have a plan in place for fully remote learning and building closures should circumstances dictate during the year. (Example: a student tests positive and you need to close a section of your school upon SD DOH recommendation for cleaning. Or, there are multiple active cases in your school, necessitating additional steps based upon SD DOH recommendations).

### *What mitigation steps are appropriate to take in my school as we reopen?*

**Answer:** What steps a school may take should start with determining the level of COVID-19 community spread based on data sources available from the SD DOH. Once you have evaluated the level of spread and risks in your community and nearby areas, determine:

**Cleaning Regimen in School Buildings Decisions:**

1. Are there active cases of students or staff in your district?
2. Can you provide cleaning supplies and personnel above typical levels?
3. At a minimum, can you ensure adequate supplies of soap, hand sanitizer, and janitorial supplies to accommodate increased hand washing and sanitizing? Where possible, can you replace touch-dispensers with hands-free equipment?

Resources: CARES Act ESSER Application, CDC's Considerations for Schools

**Building Entrance Decisions:**

1. Will you require all adults to screen for symptoms prior to arrival?
2. Will you require all students to screen for symptoms prior to arrival?
3. What tracking mechanisms will you employ for symptoms checks (i.e., signs in the hallway, parent-school agreements?)
4. Have you communicated expectations for students and staff to self-check symptoms at home prior to arrival on school grounds?

Resources: SD DOH Screening K-12 Students/Staff Guide, CDC K-12 Students Symptoms Screening Guidance, American Academy of Pediatrics Guide, CARES Act ESSER Application

**Student Vaccinations:**
Ensure students are up-to-date on vaccinations, as required by SDCL 13-28-7.1. This step is important to prevent any other sort of vaccine preventable disease during this challenging time.

Resource: SD DOE Accreditation Page

**Social Distancing Decisions:**

1. What grade level does your school serve? (Note: It will be more difficult to separate younger kids than older).
2. Can your physical building accommodate expanding distances in classrooms? Can you repurpose spaces such as gyms or libraries? (See more below).
3. How modern is your air intake system, and are you able to open windows?
4. Can you stagger meals and meal service beyond the schedules that were in place in the prior school year? Can you serve meals in classrooms, hallways, or other common areas?

Resources: Starting Well 2020: School Meals Resource, CARES Act ESSER Application, CDC's Considerations for Schools

**Classroom Design Decisions:**

1. Understand how many students you will have in your building, grade, classroom during peak times (given traditional enrollment numbers, any remote learning accommodations or "opt outs," etc.)
2. Can you reorient desks in classrooms to minimize students facing each other?
3. Consider how to minimize the number of students in the hallways at any one time, and the number of times students change classrooms where possible.
4. For classrooms where this is not possible to change orientation (for example, lab spaces), consider steps to minimize the number of students in the room at any one time as appropriate.
5. What steps can you take to minimize sharing of high touch materials (example: art supplies, classroom libraries, etc.)

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics Guide

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Decisions:**

1. Understand the level of spread and trends in your community, along with the number of people to whom a person is exposed during the day, and the level of contact. From this information, determine who will be required to wear PPE, and at what level; and which staff will be encouraged to wear PPE. Decisions will likely be different for school nurses, front receptionists, food service staff, educators, cleaning staff, etc.
2. PPE can include, but is not limited to, face masks and cloth face coverings, gloves, and other means of preventing transmission.

Resources: CARES Act ESSER Application, SD DOH Guide to Cloth Face Coverings, CDC Guidance for K-12 Administrators on Cloth Face Coverings, American Academy of Pediatrics Guide

**Electives and Activities Participation Decisions:**

1. Review SDHSAA Guidance (see Fall Task Force Guidance and Recommendations) to determine what levels of activities may be appropriate for the fall.
2. Determine what level of risk is associated with activities and elective courses (for example, chorus, band, and physical education classes).
3. As possible, find alternate delivery methods for high risk courses. When not possible, determine other means of exposing students to analogous curriculum.

Resource: South Dakota High School Activities Association COVID-19 Information

**Transportation Decisions:**

1. Determine whether you have the vehicles and/or staff to provide for social distancing in vehicles.
2. Consider the use of cloth face coverings for riders and staff.
3. Review cleaning and disinfecting protocols for vehicles and determine appropriate routines.
4. Can you stagger arrival times, drop off points, or other methods to avoid high congestion?

Resources: SD DOH Guidelines for School Buses, CARES Act ESSER Application, SD DOH Guide to Cloth Face Coverings, CDC Guidance for K-12 Administrators on Cloth Face Coverings

***Food Service Flexibilities***

For information regarding food service flexibilities, please see the "Announcements Regarding Coronavirus/COVID-19" tab on the Child and Adult Nutrition Services webpage.

# Working with the
# South Dakota Department of Health

The SD Department of Health (SD DOH) will work with school districts to provide data at a level to inform decision making, in line with appropriate privacy protections.

**Communicating Individual Positive Infection Cases**
Following the identification of a positive COVID-19 infection of a student or staff member within a school community (what constitutes a "school community" will depend on the number of separate physical school buildings in a district), the SD DOH will initiate a case investigation. For those steps, see: https://doe.sd.gov/coronavirus/documents/CaseInvestigation.pdf

If staff or a student within a school community tests positive for COVID-19, SD DOH and SD DOE will:

- Work with school officials to determine the level of exposure of other students and staff, depending on what level of close contacts the individual would likely have had. This will vary, for example, depending on the age of the student or the number of classes a teacher has.
- Recommend appropriate steps to take to accommodate cleaning, quarantine, etc., as necessary, depending on the level of exposure risk to the school community.

If there are no active cases within a school community, school officials should rely on SD DOH data to drive decision making regarding levels of opening.

Resources: SD DOH Initiating a Case Investigation in a K-12 School, SD DOH COVID-19 School Scenarios, SD DOH What If . . .

# Policy and Funding

As district leaders build a plan for the 2020-21 school year, flexibility will be important, as will meeting key deadlines and requirements. Funding made available to schools through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act should be tracked separately and follow the standard cost principles that spending be necessary, reasonable and allocable.

***Policy***

During spring of 2020, **certain federal flexibilities** were made available in order to prioritize actions during the coronavirus pandemic. Some of these flexibilities remain in place, while others expire with the end of the 2019-20 school year.

- ESEA assessment/accountability waiver – removes requirement for state testing and related accountability for 2019-20 school year only
- ESEA fiscal waiver – extends time period in which certain FY 2018 federal funds must be spent
- Various food service-related waivers

**At the state level**, Senate Bill 188 allows the Secretary of Education to waive **instructional hours** should the Governor or the President of the United States declare a state of emergency and the affected school is located within the applicable area. This authority extends through the 2020-21 school year. The Department of Education will communicate to schools should this condition exist during the 2020-21 school year.

When **calculating instructional hours**, flex learning days count the same as a day of instruction and should be recorded as such in Infinite Campus. Superintendents make the determination as to what constitutes a "day of instruction." When implementing flex learning, notify parents in advance, when possible, of flex learning days and expectations for engagement on those days. Also include how attendance will be counted and the resources that will be provided to students during virtual instruction.

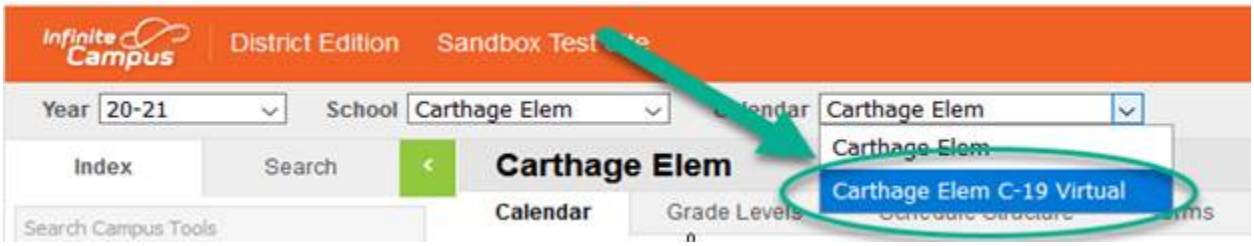
**Attendance** is determined at the local level. If necessary, work with your school board to adjust what constitutes "attendance" in light of COVID-19 circumstances.

The **deadlines** below will remain in effect for the 2020-21 school year:

- **Calendars**: Entered into Infinite Campus by the last Friday in August (ARSD 24:17:03:08). Districts may manually change *days of instruction* once entered. *(See further information below).*
- **Student Data:**
    - State Aid Fall Enrollment Count Date: Last Friday of September (SDCL 13-13-10.1)
    - All enrollments entered by Oct. 15 (SDCL 13-3-51)
    - Student Data Submission (ARSD 24:17:03:02): *The due date for submission of the fall student data through the student information system is 15 days following the last Friday of September of each school year. State aid fall enrollment count is final on the last business day of October and no additional students may be added after this date but may be removed if found to be reported in error. The December child count data is due 10 days following December 1 of each school year.*
- **Meal Status**: Entered in Infinite Campus by October 31.
- **Special Education Child Count**: December 1.

**Calendar options for students attending virtually for school year 2020-21 due to COVID-19** are now available. A district utilizing distance learning options 1, 3, or 4 in the department's Distance Learning Guidance can create an additional calendar(s) within an already existing school to house their students who have chosen to attend virtually for school year 2020-21 due to COVID-19. For consistency, the department is asking districts to name these new calendars as follows:

Calendar Name = Name of School C-19 Virtual (Example: Carthage Elem C-19 Virtual)




Districts are not allowed to house all students (K-12) who are attending virtually in one calendar. Districts must utilize their existing school structure and create separate virtual calendars for each attendance center. (Example: Elementary, Middle School, High School).

The **K-12 state accreditation process** is proceeding as normal. Schools that are scheduled for review in SY20-21 have already been notified, and their review dates have been set. A series of refresher training webinars will be available for those schools during August and September. Information regarding those webinars will be sent directly to the schools.

Accreditation information may be found at https://doe.sd.gov/oatq/districtaccreditation.aspx
Accreditation questions may be directed to doeaccred@state.sd.us.

### *Funding*

When **budgeting**, consider how best to use allocations under the CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). Information on allowable expenses can be found in the SD DOE's Guide for School Districts and Memo to Superintendents and Business Managers. Updates on CARES Act funding can be found the department's CARES Act webpage.

**Additional Resources:**

- CARES Act ESSER Application
- US ED page on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund
- State Aid Budgeting
- Infinite Campus guidance

# Resources

- SD DOE Starting Well Website  Find more specific resources and guides related to considerations for starting back to school in Fall 2020.
- CDC Operating Schools During COVID-19
- SD DOH Symptom Checker Sign
- CDC K-12 Students Symptoms Screening Guidance
- CDC "Stop the Spread" Poster
- SD DOH COVID-19 Mitigation in Schools
- SD DOH COVID-19 School Scenarios
- SD DOH Reopening Schools Checklist
- SD DOH Initiating a Case Investigation in a K-12 School
- SD DOH What If . . .
- SD DOH Guidelines for School Buses
- American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry