



THE FLORIDA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION  
**PANDEMIC RESPONSE GUIDE**



**June 2020**

[www.FSBA.org](http://www.FSBA.org)

The MISSION of the Florida School Boards Association is to increase student achievement through the development of effective School Board leadership and advocacy for public education.

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# Introduction

*"Any kind of crisis can be good. It wakes you up." -Ryan Reynolds*

This reference guide is meant to assist School Boards in navigating the reopening of schools after transitioning to closed-campus learning in Spring of 2020. This guide will provide questions for boards to discuss and consider, to ask Superintendents and staff, and to drive timely, relevant community conversations that will help lead by reassurance. School districts must harness forced changes that have proven beneficial to serving all students, employees, and families to be prepared for a dynamic public education delivery system of the future.

Since February, 2020, Covid-19 has left over 40 million Americans jobless, more than 100,000 people dead, and millions of children hurt in a country where a quarter of children lived in poverty prior to the pandemic. For these children to best be ready to learn and thrive, they must feel physically and emotionally safe and protected at school. What plans are in place to address student and staff wellbeing in schools *before expecting that they will be able to return to business-as-usual in school learning?*

As we begin a new and uncertain school year, we must help reassure our community. That should include all members of the community, regardless of location, language spoken, or access to technology. Emotions can be high and views will be diverse. It is essential that we are patient and offer kindness and understanding, as we build upon the trust we have already established with our stakeholders.

*"Losing your head in a crisis is a good way to become the crisis." -C.J. Redwine*

In times of crisis, it is imperative that a governance team be high functioning—that is the only way for success to follow upheaval. Crisis combined with a dysfunctional governance team is not a recipe for success. An open, transparent team committed to the hard work ahead will certainly lead to positive results for the entire community. We challenge the district leadership team to use the pandemic as a way of finding commonality of purpose. As School Boards, we want to promote connection and belonging, and rally people toward one community and one mission: our students. We must stay focused on making all decisions based on what is best for all members of our school communities and provide continued grace and compassion. We must be insightful about feedback, failures, and proven strategies and continue to build upon reasons why parents should choose public education.

The best way to communicate and maintain positivity is to be equipped with the information necessary to be successful. Remember that School Boards direct their Superintendents with “what” to do while Superintendents decide “how” to achieve those goals. Ultimately, each district will have to weigh and measure the value of in-person instruction as compared to the risk of Covid-19. These decisions must be made in collaboration with families and staff, with the guidance of community health partners, and state leaders.

*"When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters -- one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity." -John F. Kennedy*

Where should you start? Governance teams should review the district strategic plan to refresh everyone on the district’s mission and vision. All decisions should be made with an eye toward the district’s already approved strategic goals. Then, governance teams should identify the district’s top goals for reopening in the Fall and predicate decisions based upon those priorities.

This document is far from a complete inventory of items that governance teams should discuss and consider. It is, however, a valuable starting point for districts to ensure that full and robust conversation takes place, that policy impacts are considered, and that innovative thinking and planning for the future occurs.

## **Responsibility**

*“The school board shall operate, control and supervise all free public schools within the school district.”*

- Art. IX, § 4(b), Fla. Const.

Article IX of Florida’s Constitution, clarifies that School Boards are both responsible for and maintain the authority to direct Florida’s school districts. Article IX states, *“The school board shall operate, control and supervise all free public schools within the school district.”*

Florida School Boards are sovereign governments and, with this sovereignty, have great responsibility for the care of children. School Boards are the largest public or private employer in many counties across the state. School Boards have the additional responsibility for the care and safety of their employees.

School Boards work collectively to meet the academic and personal needs of all students through partnerships with the Florida Department of Education, other local entities and agencies, private organizations and individuals. Florida School Boards, with recommendations from their local Superintendents, must continue to work collaboratively to meet and exceed the expectations of students and families.

## Policy/Governance

*“The purpose of any school board member is a policy making role, not daily operations. He was not elected as the chief operating officer.” -Bill Bird*

It should be standard procedure that any plan created on behalf of the district be shared with the School Board for input, acceptance, and/or approval. Do you have a policy that requires this? Did the board approve learning continuity plans in the Spring? Has the board participated in discussions for the Fall’s continuity plan?

Consider what your district’s guiding principles will be as you reopen schools (ex., equity, safety, innovation). Then, build any plans using those guiding principles and your existing strategic plan.

### **What new policies and policy changes should your governance team make?**

- Which proposed changes to policies should include sunset provisions based on their expiration upon the pandemic ending?
- Are specific guidelines from the CDC, state or local DOH, inducing policy changes?
  - If so, which changes are temporary/permanent?
  - If the entity’s guidelines provide the basis for a policy change, have you built in automatic changes as the entity’s guidelines continue to change?

### **Policy Topics for Consideration:**

- Visitors and volunteers, including vendors at physical campuses
- Changes to school calendars and quickly pivoting to remote learning, and/or providing a blended learning environment
- Guidelines or criteria for the decision to close a campus, a group of campuses, or all campuses in response to a crisis (*in this case, outbreak of infection*)
  - An emergency policy that grants the Superintendent authority to close a campus, a group of campuses, or all campuses in response to outbreaks of Covid-19
- Requiring that equity be an integral part of learning and technology plans
- Remote School Board meeting guidelines (*following all statutory requirements*)
- Virtual attendance at board meetings to decrease risk for vulnerable populations
- Changes to School Board meeting schedule
- Remote work expectations and responsibilities
- Amendment of student attendance policies
- School facility rentals and cancelation of contracts in the event of campus closures
- District, school management succession plans in the event of illness or death
- Necessary changes to hurricane shelter plans (*in consultation with county*) and emergency evacuation plans
- Special accommodations for students and staff members who are members of vulnerable populations
- Appropriate use of personal devices, technology, and internet ethics
- Student Code of Conduct adjustments to reflect Covid-19 related offenses
- Student transfers, especially after the school year starts, and other enrollment procedures



# Physical Plant

*“There is much more to school than buildings.” -John Warner*

## **How will County/State DOH, CDC guidelines affect decision-making, policies, procedures?**

- What social distancing requirements will we be required to meet?
  - Which areas on campus can be repurposed for use as instructional space to accommodate smaller class sizes, social distancing requirements?
  - What guidelines must be in place when using outside spaces?
- What sanitation requirements will we be required to meet?
  - How will you guarantee fidelity to requirements at all facilities?
- How will County/State DOH, CDC involvement and consideration of FERPA/HIPPA affect decision-making, policies, procedures?
  - Have we established, or been guided on the establishment of criteria for mandatory quarantine, return to campus, and/or campus, district closures?
  - Which details, if any, can be communicated? By who, to whom?
- What protocols will be expected of staff to support or assist with contact tracing efforts by DOH?

## **How do we balance Stoneman Douglas Requirements with Covid-19 requirements?**

- Where are their misalignments between MSD requirements and Covid-19 requirements?
  - How will you overcome them?
  - How will social distancing requirements impact things like single point of entry or start times?
  - How will active shooter or other emergency drills be effected by social distancing requirements?

## **Do we have protocols in place (such as temperature checks, attestation, etc.) for the following scenarios on/at buses, campuses, extracurricular events, district offices, and other sites before, during, and after the school day?**

- Student, staff, or visitor arrives to board bus
- Student, staff, or visitor arrives on campus
- Student, staff or visitor has *direct contact* with Covid-19 positive individual
- Student, staff or visitor tests positive for Covid-19
- Student, staff, or visitor is exhibiting symptoms on a campus
- Student, staff, or visitor refuses to comply with agreed upon protocol to minimize exposure (mask, temperature check, social distancing, other protocols)
  - When student, staff, or visitor in any of the scenarios above does not have transportation or escort to leave campus

**What resources can we utilize to encourage a culture of responsibility across the district and within our community?**

- Have the CDC or DOH provided Covid-19 signage for our schools and district offices?
- Do we plan to have a district-wide communications campaign to help with a consistent message?
- Are our employees trained properly to understand and enforce safety protocols and support consistent messaging?

**Which typical practices will be altered to ensure limited exposure to students and staff?**

- How are we addressing practices such as the buddy system for elementary students?
- How are we addressing points of congregation such as water fountains, lockers, and bus loading areas?
- How do we plan to change food services on campus, dining locations, and additional trash receptacles?
- How do we plan to address the use of gyms, weight rooms, playgrounds, and like facilities?
- Do we have protocols for cleaning during and after the school day, and do we have the resources (cleaning supplies *and* staff) to accomplish them?
- Have we considered halting agreements with community partners who may utilize facilities outside of the school day (churches, Boy Scouts, etc.) to limit on-campus exposure and to assist with contact tracing, as needed?
- What changes have we considered for appropriate classroom décor and/or removal of unnecessary furniture, sharable supplies to limit contamination?

## Academics

*“Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.” -John R. Wooden*

### **What did we learn from Spring 2020 and/or from surveying parents and staff?**

- What do parents and staff want?
- How did learning go during the pandemic?
- What went well and should be continued?
- What challenges did we experience that must be overcome if we have to repeat distance learning?

### **What is the district's academic plan for a traditional reopening, a shift to blended learning, and full virtual instruction?**

### **What flexibilities are we providing to ensure more choices are available within our system to accommodate students and parents as they make the decision on how/if they return to school?**

- Do we have programs for students or staff members who are members of vulnerable populations?
- How are we ensuring that all families fully understand all options and implications for each option offered to them (*ex. enrollment, withdrawal, financial impact to district/student, district virtual, FLVS Flex, etc.*)?
- What policy changes will we need to request via regulatory or legislative action to provide more flexibility to students, families, and staff?
- Are we able to allow students to engage in virtual learning while staying anchored to their assigned schools so that students do not have to re-enroll in their assigned school when the pandemic has passed?
- How are we maintaining connections between students and families and their local public school during periods of distance learning so as to maintain the school community?
- Do we have health/safety criteria set to determine which type of learning environment students will return to (blended models, etc.)?
  - Do we have criteria set for transitioning from face to face to remote learning, as needed?
  - Who makes this decision? (DOH or Superintendent, both, can one overrule the other?)

### **How are we ensuring data privacy and protecting student data?**

- Does the district have the IT capacity to support all learning access by students, teachers, parents, college admissions, and employers in a safe and efficient way?

**How are we providing flexibility in student progression decisions to allow time to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on student achievement?**

- How are we ensuring that resources are available for students in need of support?
- Have we considered grouping students by ability, rather than age?
- Which students should be prioritized for face-to-face instruction, and have we given consideration to potential social-emotional impacts of singling these students out?
- How are we preparing educators to identify students in need of intervention and providing adequate academic and social-emotional support to identified students?

**How are we focusing on the whole child in our academic plan moving forward?**

- Is there a way to build adequate time for physical activities, arts, music, social interactions, and free play into our potentially modified schedules?

**Have we analyzed the new standards to identify crosswalks that could help build a bridge between the Spring 2020 with Fall 2020?**

- What is the district’s plan to present content students may have missed in Spring 2020?
- How can we accelerate students who need acceleration?

**Have we reviewed and prioritized school supply lists with an eye toward infection control and community economic circumstances?**

**How do we plan to monitor absenteeism trends in schools?**

- What flexibilities are being provided to families with concerns about physical attendance?

**How do we ensure that we view all decisions, practices, and policies through an equity lens?**

- Do we have plans in place to provide access for all students to high quality educational opportunities?
- Will *every* child be provided an opportunity to learn through various mediums – on campus face to face, virtual/remote, blended delivery?
- How are we ensuring equitable access for ESE, ELL?
  - Are we ensuring that special education services can be delivered to those requiring or electing distance learning?
  - How are we providing inclusion for medically vulnerable students?
  - How are we providing education in “the least restrictive environment” for high needs students?
  - How will we utilizing homebound/homeschool services during Covid-19?
  - What supports are in place for English Language Learners?

**How are we ensuring that teachers remain in charge of their classrooms in a virtual or blended environment?**

- How are we empowering teachers to be innovative in their physical/virtual classroom settings?
- Are we providing training to successfully navigate the transitions between classroom and distance learning?

- How can we invest in platforms for teachers to build their classrooms rather than programs that remove the teacher from the learning experience?
- How are we making an effort to ensure a quality teacher/student connection on digital platforms?

**What adjustments to the accountability system need to be maintained, and what additional adjustments do we need to request?**

- Should the abeyance of school grades continue due to uncertainty?
- How will new delivery models and Covid-19 related changes to instruction affect teacher evaluations?
  - How will VAM be calculated and/or used?
- How will learning gains be determined and validated during transitions between distance and brick and mortar learning?
- Will progress monitoring be required across all delivery models?
  - Will it be the same for virtual instruction and face-to-face? Will changes be needed?
- Will the same testing calendar apply to all delivery options?

## Social Emotional

*“In each of us there is an innate ability to create joy out of suffering, to find hope in the most hopeless of situations, and to heal any relationship that is in need of healing.” -The Book of Forgiving*

**What efforts are we making to consider the impacts poverty, trauma, and potential PTSD have had, and may continue to have, on learning and the ability to perform duties at work?**

- Are we able to provide additional social workers for students and employees to work through impacts of Covid-19?
- Are we providing enough counselors and ensuring counselors are being appropriately utilized in schools?
- Are we providing enough school psychologists and ensuring adequate mental health screenings and services for students, staff, and school resource officers?
- How should the frequency or process of active shooter and other emergency drills be adjusted to minimize additional stress on students?

**Have we determined how to ensure that the newly mandated Mental Health Education curriculum is appropriate for distance learning?**

**How do we plan to utilize current events surrounding racial inequity as a teachable moment and create opportunities for community conversations regard equity and inclusion to occur?**

- Are school leaders and teachers properly trained to lead these conversations?

**How do we plan to provide opportunities for real time socialization to occur in a distanced teaching and learning environment?**

**Are there any activities that no longer make sense to offer under these changing conditions?**

- Are there any new activities that could take their place?

## Human Resources

*“The value of a business is a function of how well the financial capital and the intellectual capital are managed by the human capital. You'd better get the human capital part right.” -Dave Bookbinder*

### **Have consideration been given to how the district reopening plan will impact employees?**

- How have we assured buy-in from employees?
- Was adequate time provided for employees to give feedback on the plan?
- What specific training will be added to assist employees in return to work as well as potential contact with Covid-19?
- Have any HR-related shortfalls been identified within the plan, and if so, how will they be addressed moving forward?

It is important to consider how to consistently handle issues across the district to ensure fairness for all employees. Due to ongoing changes, there may be needed Memoranda of Understanding between the district and professional associations.

### **Considerations for changes to collective bargaining agreements:**

- Adjustments to teacher evaluations in the absence of state testing data
- Consulting staff on potential changes to the approved school calendar
- Potential changes to leave of absence, sick leave rules, and sick time banks
- Potential impact on supplements in the event of a campus closure or inability to offer program
- Managing expectations of remote employees, to include parameters/managing parent and student expectations
- Preparing staff to address individual student needs due to potential learning losses
- Potential need to change job descriptions
- Preparing employees for potential changes to working environments
- Thorough explanations of employee benefits to include the availability of telemedicine
- Addressing staff compensation during required quarantine periods and/or any bonus pay for workers during crisis
- Requiring staff members to wear PPE and funding for PPE
- Altering teacher training to prepare for a new digital platform or platforms
- Changing teacher retention strategies to keep high quality teachers in the classroom during the pandemic
- Remote working opportunities for staff that are members of vulnerable populations and for staff that are afraid to return to campuses, but are not members of vulnerable populations
- Repurposing staff, as needed, should closed-campus learning resume due to health or safety concerns
  - Do you have your employees in the right positions?

### **Are there ways to maximize highly effective teacher impacts?**

## Fiscal

*“To be frugal is laudable but to blatantly insist on inferior education for our children is appalling.”*

-Kim Burningham

### **What plans are in place to handle fiscal uncertainties created by the pandemic?**

- Is the district prepared for a possible reduction in force or enrollment?
  - How will potential reductions in force or enrollment affect the need and/or ability to offer certain programs?
- How will the current funding model (based on physical attendance) be impacted by potential increased enrollment in virtual, homeschool, blended models, etc.?
  - Do we have the option of district franchise FLVS Flex to maximize flexibility for students, as well as FTE?
  - What is the impact on varying percentages of students going FLVS or District virtual school?
  - What is the impact on the district if more people choose to go virtual than face to face?
    - What is the cost?
- Have we budgeted for increased technology and programming needs such as providing each student with a device, assisting with internet access and/or infrastructure?
- Which, if any, contracts were affected by campus closures, and do we anticipate contractual issues given the possibility of future closures?
  - Do we need changes to procurement processes to include impacts of potential suspension of procurement processes in emergency situations?
  - Are there contract provisions to protect the district from contractual obligations affected by pandemics?
- Does the district have a plan to maximize unforeseen surpluses (such as saving funds on gasoline) to make up for losses?
- How can we provide a continuation of essential services, especially if physical plants must be closed again?
- Have we experienced interruption to maintenance and/or construction projects?
  - Are we prepared to make changes to the five year capital plan, as needed?

### **How does our district plan to handle district property and mitigating losses?**

- What plans are in place for the return of text and library books, technological devices, hot spots, athletic equipment, band equipment, etc., in the event of a student or staff member having to leave campus and not return, or in the event of district-wide campus closures?
- What plans are in place to allow access to personal items for retrieval in the scenarios listed above?

**How much CARES Act revenue will the district receive (or has the district received) and how will those funds be spent? What flexibility are we afforded?**



# Communications

*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”*

-George Bernard Shaw

Timely, relevant, and consistent communication is imperative in any emergency response. As constitutional officers and community representatives, School Board members must lead by reassuring to inspire public confidence, a tolerance for ambiguity, and a comfort level with uncertainty.

## **How will guidance, rule, law from CDC/DOH/State/Federal dictate how, what, and when we communicate?**

- How do we make sure the public understands the guidelines we have been given by these entities?
- How are we communicating local data with our students, families, and staff?
- What information, if any, can or should be shared with the school community should a student, staff member, or visitor test positive for Covid-19?
  - Whose responsibility is it to communicate this information?

## **Do we have procedures in place to ensure the School Board is included in rollout and decision making?**

- School Board members represent and are regularly the source of information for constituents and families—how is information being communicated in a timely way to School Boards?
- How will our leadership team lead by example, and how can the School Board assist in creating that culture?

## **How will we prepare our community and staff for what the return to school will look like?**

- Have we considered the tone of our communications with parents, employees, students, and the community?
- How will we communicate important issues, updates, and changes with students, families, and employees?
- How will we ensure all stakeholders have an in-depth understanding of these issues and logistics?

## **How are we ensuring all stakeholders are receiving and understand our communications?**

- Do we plan on providing learning opportunities for all employees so that they can understand our district process and be ambassadors in communicating with stakeholders?
- Have we considered ESE, ELL, those without internet, and other communication obstacles?
  - Will we provide communications in multiple languages and on multiple platforms?
- How are we continuing to involve students, parents, employees in feedback loops for decision making?
- How are we leveraging community partnerships, local media, statewide associations, and others to help spread our message?

- Do we have a clearly defined single source and/or location for Covid-19 update information to be accessed?
  - Are we updating this information hub frequently to keep our school community informed?
  - Which communication tools need to be added to our traditional communications plan to ensure all stakeholders are informed in a timely, effective way?

# Advocacy

*“If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time – a tremendous whack.”*

-Winston Churchill

There will be a multitude of issues that will require the School Board to demonstrate its skills in advocacy. Any alteration, waiver, or change to state rule or statute will require a commitment to effective advocacy in order to for the adjustment to be granted.

## Topics for Advocacy Considerations

- Needed waivers for abeyance of state rules
- Modifications to attendance requirements
- Waivers to suspend or provide alternatives to active shooter and other safety drill requirements (*social emotional impact, social distancing, etc.*)
- Release of liability
- Flexibility to make decisions that are right for your community (*fiscal implications*)
- Reimbursement for food service for distance learners
- Flexibility with transportation
- Modification of the FTE Impact (\$5624 virtual vs \$7586 personal)

## Tools to consider:

- Formal Resolutions
- Solicited support from stakeholders
- Congressional Letter of Support
- Joint requests (i.e. Superintendents, Foundations, Administrators)
- Survey and solicited feedback from stakeholders
- Social media
- Formal reports
- Collaborating with local delegation

## Audience for Advocacy Considerations

- Parents, students, community leaders, such as faith based leaders
- Education associations/stakeholders
- Legislators
- Department of Education
- Congress
- Governor
- FL SBOE
- Other states
- Local Officials/Department of Health
- Department of Emergency Management

## Future Considerations

*“People who bring transformative change have courage, know how to re-frame the problem, and have a sense of urgency.” -Malcolm Gladwell*

It was a sense of urgency in response to an immediate health threat that allowed most districts, teachers, students, and families to quickly pivot from traditional classroom instruction to virtual and other alternative methods of instructional delivery in just 2 short weeks. As the newness of our current circumstances subsides and schools settle into the 2020-21 academic year, School Boards should be looking to the future with the same sense of urgency which was employed in rolling out alternative learning platforms. This is the time to be creative and encourage systemic changes that will lead to stronger, more effective, and more equitable public schools.

The foundation upon which any sustainable change can occur is choice for families and flexibility in existing regulatory frameworks. Many families have discovered through the pandemic that traditional classroom instruction works best for their children. Other families discovered that their children thrived in the virtual environment. Many teachers, too, found that the new structures allowed them to be creative in ways they never considered. Given choice and flexibility, each district, each school, each student, each teacher, and each family will truly succeed. This is what makes alternative education programs work, and this is what our children and our communities deserve.

While all of this may seem daunting, try to maintain a focus on the endless potential. How can you demonstrate to your community that, as a school district, you are looking at new processes, examining what and how learning occurs, and that you are willing to evolve to meet the changing needs of students, families, and communities?

By examining what we have learned during the pandemic, we are free to create sweeping sustainable changes in how we deliver high quality instruction to our students. Since there is no “back to normal” that we can see, when the pandemic ends, we encourage School Board members to seize the opportunity for the betterment of our students and communities.

Just as we provided this Pandemic Response Guide to assist you in your board conversations as you plan for schools to reopen in Fall 2020, we plan to bring you a Future Considerations Response Guide to assist you in your board conversations as you plan for the years beyond 2020. Look for this guide in the Fall.