

Binghamton City School District COVID-19 Reopening FAQs

Updated 7/31/2020

Frequent updates will be made as guidance is updated. Please consult our BCSD COVID-19 website: [COVID-19 Updates 2020-2021](#)

Please also consult the following guidance document that have informed our decisions:

Broome County Department of Health: [Coronavirus Information](#)

NYS Department of Health Guidance: [INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AT PRE-K TO GRADE 12 SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY](#)

NYS Education Department Guidance: [Recovering, Rebuilding, and Renewing: The Spirit of New York's Schools - Reopening Guidance](#)

NYS Education Department Reopening Presentation: [Recovering, Rebuilding, and Renewing the Spirit of New York State Schools: Reopening Guidance](#)

NYS Education Department Reopening FAQs: [School Reopening FAQs](#)

CONDITIONS FOR RE-OPENING

Under what conditions can schools in New York State reopen?

The guiding rule is that our Southern Tier region has to have a daily infection rate of 5% or less over a 14-day period. If those conditions are met, schools would be able to open facilities to students. Conversely, if the regional infection rate is greater than 9% based on a 7-day moving average after August 1st, facilities would be closed for students.

Who makes the final decision as to whether in-person student instruction can occur?

Governor Cuomo will be announcing whether schools are eligible to open facilities for student, in-person learning during the August 1st-7th week.

FAMILY OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLING

Will families have a choice as to whether or not to send their children?

For the period of time that COVID-19 remains a health threat, families will be provided a choice as the start of the school year. During the July 27th week, each building called all families to ascertain their preference for their students returning to in-person instruction if schools are permitted to reopen facilities to students. Even if schools are allowed to reopen facilities to students, a fully remote option will be available to students. We are asking families to make this commitment at the start of the school year, with an opportunity to revisit their choice at the end of January 2021. for the first semester only - in-person or remote - through January 2021.

What happens if I select remote learning, and then decide for in-person learning during the school year? Or vice versa?

If school facilities are reopened to students, we envision semester-long student groups for fully remote instruction and an in-person model. These stable groupings will promote consistency in both instructional modality and class lists.

However, we do recognize that unique circumstances may exist and will work with those situations on an individual basis.

Can families choose different options for different students in their household?

We are asking families these questions per student at this time, and household options may be discussed with your building principal. Our goal is to give families as much flexibility as possible under the state guidance.

Can families select a Homeschooling option, beyond the August 1st deadline, after the Governor makes his decision next week?

Yes. We have historically accepted Homeschooling requests after the summer deadline. There are also provisions in the regulations that address parental rights to make this decision for their student after the school year begins:

Parents who determine to commence home instruction after the start of the school year, or who establish residence in the school district after the start of the school year, shall provide written notice of their intention to educate their child at home within 14 days following the commencement of home instruction within the school district.

For additional Homeschooling questions, please contact Deb Card, Attendance and Pupil Services, at 762-8114.

If a hybrid model is adopted and a student shows up on the wrong day, how will that be handled?

Building principals will contact student families and arrange for pick up or delivery. As with all students and adults, temperatures will be taken for all students and staff who enter a building on any given day. The hybrid schedule is being created so that we keep a minimum number of students in each class at all times, making it not possible to accommodate students who appear on the wrong day.

What happens if there is a spike in COVID-19 cases in the Southern Tier region? Are there plans in place to pivot to full remote learning for all students?

The guidance for reopening and closing is based on the trends outlined in the first question in this section. We are preparing, however, to be able to pivot to fully remote instruction at any time as needed, as occurred in March 2020.

SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 and POSITIVE TESTS

What happens if a student or staff member in a building tests positive for COVID-19? Or, if a student or staff member develops symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 and leaves school, under what protocol may they return?

The NYS Department of Health guidance addresses protocols for returning to school facilities after a positive COVID-19 test. BCSD will establish protocols and procedures, in consultation with the local health department, about the requirements for determining when individuals, particularly students, who screened positive for COVID-19 symptoms can return to the in-person learning environment at school.

The district's return to school protocol includes documentation from a health care provider following evaluation, negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result, and symptom resolution, or if COVID-19 positive, release from guarantee. The guidance reference in this answer may be found here: [Interim Guidance for Public and Private Employees Returning to Work Following COVID-19 Infection or Exposure](#)

Will the school district be conducting COVID-19 tests on site?

No, school districts are not COVID-19 testing sites. COVID-19 tests may be arranged with the county Department of Health. For more information on COVID-19 testing and site locations in our area, please visit [COVID-19 Testing | Department of Health](#).

MEALS

Will BCSD be providing meals for students who choose remote learning?

Yes, BCSD will continue providing meal access for all students as we have been doing since March 2020.

Can students still bring their own meals to school as in the past?

Students will be socially-distanced in our cafeterias at least six feet apart. Students may bring their own meals, but food sharing will be strictly prohibited.

Will Binghamton High School have an open campus for lunch as in the past?

As we await further guidance, this is an ongoing conversation. More information will be forthcoming.

MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

How can we ensure that students wear masks in school?

All students will be required to wear masks and will be provided one. They will be taught appropriate ways to wear masks through building-wide programs and the use of social stories. Students will be provided mask breaks throughout the day and as long as they remain 6 feet apart during instruction, may remove them during instruction.

How can we ensure that students will remain socially distanced in school?

BCSD has worked with our architectural firm to ascertain square footage of all building classrooms and spaces. With this information, our building administrator and facilities teams have been measuring out six-foot and 12-foot spaces, as appropriate under the guidance, in each space.

We will also be adding signage on the floors and walls to remind all students and staff of social distancing guidelines, as you have probably seen if you have been in any store or public space during this period.

Is the district planning to keep students distanced in bathrooms?

Yes, building teams are working on plans to ensure that students have singular access to bathrooms and maintain social distancing.

How will staff be expected to handle situations where students refuse to wear their masks or engage in otherwise inappropriate COVID-behaviors?

Our Behavioral Task Force is analyzing this issue, revising the Code of Conduct, and making recommendations to handle these types of situations using progressive discipline. That information will be communicated to all staff and community as our potential facilities reopening grows closer.

What training will the district provide to all students and staff on mask wearing, hand hygiene, social distancing, and related topics?

Ongoing training is required for mask wearing, hand hygiene, social distancing, and related topics. These trainings will be provided through multiple modalities including digital platforms involving instructional videos, group training with social distancing, and other methods. These trainings will be provided on a regular and ongoing basis.

PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Will all staff and students be required to wear masks and appropriate PPE?

Yes. Students will wear masks when not able to maintain 6 feet of separation. Per Governor Cuomo's Executive Order 202.17 (April 17), any individual who is over age two and able to medically and mentally tolerate a face-covering shall be required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, physical distance.

Recognizing that wearing a mask all day may be challenging for some students, particularly younger students, state guidance encourages schools to schedule mask breaks for students (when they can maintain physical distance). Students must also be allowed to remove masks for meals. In a recent FAQ from NYSED, they clarified that masks OR physically distancing (6 feet) OR barriers are necessary during school (see exception for the bus below).

Are masks with breathing valves acceptable?

We know that additional information on masks with valves has been released and we are currently reviewing that guidance to help answer this question.

Will BCSD provide masks and appropriate PPE to all students and staff who need them?

Yes, BCSD will be prepared to provide masks and appropriate PPE to all staff and students who need them. This includes students and staff who may have been provided masks and PPE at an earlier date, but require additional ones. The masks being provided are washable and reusable.

Can students or staff supplement their PPE in an appropriate manner?

We recognize that students and staff may have masks they have been wearing and are comfortable with. We will work with staff and students to make sure their mask and PPE needs are met.

Will students and staff have daily health screenings when they arrive at schools?

While the exact protocol may differ per buildings, all students and staff will have their temperatures screened upon entering the building. DOH and NYSED guidance

also suggests that families should screen their students' temperatures before leaving for school, as well.

State guidance has stated that 100 degrees is the personal temperature threshold for requiring any students or staff to wait in the building's quarantine area before exiting the building.

What if a student or employee develops symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 during the school day?

District staff will be trained on COVID-19 symptoms and made aware of warning signs for possible fevers and other suggestive markers. Students who exhibit symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 will be sent to the building's health office for further evaluation by training professional nursing staff.

What does the quarantine area consist of and how will it be supervised?

Each building principal is identifying an area or areas in their buildings where students who exhibit symptoms or screen with temperatures 100 degrees or higher will wait before going home. These rooms will be supervised by District staff who will be provided with additional PPE for their protection. Each area will also allow for required social distancing.

What is the district's capacity around nursing staffing and how will nurses offices look different based on state guidance?

BCSD has increased their nursing staff capacity this summer and is planning for nursing areas based on state guidance. Guidance dictates that "sick" and "well" areas are required, much like walk-ins and waiting rooms have. Each building principal has worked with their nursing professionals to determine final details on these spaces.

What are the district's cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing protocols?

Our district's Safety Committee is currently meeting to plan for additional cleaning runs and disinfection procedures. In addition, BCSD has invested in hospital-grade cleaning machines that are able to eliminate coronavirus from surfaces and electrostatic machines that sanitize air. Moreover, large Ozone cleaning machines that can sanitize shared classroom materials.

All chemicals used within the district are kept on a Material Data Sheet as required by New York State law.

How will the district handle drinking fountains?

According to state guidance, drinking foundations are to be repurposed as refilling stations and signage has been posted with these directions.

What testing has been done on the district's air, water, and ventilation systems?

Prior to any reopening, all district water systems will be tested to ensure compliance with safety standards after the long shut-down. Also, lead testing requirements remain in place. We are working with our outside contractors and architects to inspect all building air ventilation systems to ensure they are working properly and providing proper air flow, while meeting or exceeding ventilation requirements. Air filters have been inspected and replaced as necessary.

What might classroom configurations look like given state guidelines on social distancing?

Classrooms and other instructional spaces will be reconfigured to ensure social distancing is maintained, with student desks being the primary furniture in the teaching space. Desks will all be facing the same direction rather than each other to reduce transmission of virus-containing droplets from talking, coughing, sneezing, etc. Other strategies being employed include:

- Restricting the use of classrooms and other places where students, faculty, and staff gather (e.g., lockers, cubbies, entryways, hallways), so that individuals can be physically distanced
- Rethinking instruction to enable projections or displays to have students distanced, rather than gathering closely to watch a demonstration.

Will the district keep doors open in order to increase air circulation?

Yes. Promoting as much air circulation as possible is one of the CDC's suggestions in workplaces: [COVID-19 Guidance: Businesses and Employers](#). Our District Safety Committee is currently exploring door opening protocols and updates will be provided soon.

Where will students eat meals in classrooms given social distancing guidelines?

Social distancing guidelines require six feet in all directions, including when students eat breakfast or lunch. Building principals are working with their teams to analyze their eating spaces and determine how many students can safely eat in traditional cafeteria spaces at the same time. Since the classroom will have desks 6 feet apart, the spaces will be conducive to meals, if needed.

Will elementary students have recess?

BCSD believes that recess is an important part of each student's social and emotional well-being. Given state guidelines on social distancing, students would have to maintain a 12-foot distance between themselves and any other student. Our K-5 principals are currently analyzing their student rosters and playground space to make the best decision for student health and safety. Recess will not likely be built into the typical lunch block at the elementary level.

Will visitors be allowed in schools?

In general, no unsolicited visitors will be allowed in the building. BCSD acknowledges that some visitors to schools will be unavoidable. Facilities contractors, vending machine employees, and others may require access to school facilities as part of their jobs. BCSD will follow Department of Health guidelines for all school visitors, which are the same screening requirements of all students and staff. Temperatures will be screened before entry and any visitor with a temperature of 100 degrees or greater will not be permitted to enter school facilities.

In addition, visitors will be asked to answer the three COVID-19 screening questions upon entry concerning their COVID-19 history, their potential exposure to others, and their travel to states on the mandatory quarantine list. They will also be required to sign in and out of the building.

Will afterschool programs still be allowed to operate in schools?

Our community partners and in-district programs are important components of our overall program. Latch-key, child-care programs will continue to run. We are evaluating other programs and their ability to run effectively while maintaining social distancing protocols.

Will PreK-2 students, in particular, have to maintain their own supplies?

With social distancing, shared crayons, markers, and other items will be minimized this year. BCSD has invested in special machines that can clean these types of materials in 30-minutes to minimize risks of exposure to students and staff.

What cleaning protocols are in place for musical instruments?

The National Association for Music Education has suggested protocols for cleaning musical instruments: [COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines](#). BCSD's Fine Arts Department is exploring appropriate cleaning materials and protocols to ensure that students can participate to the greatest extent possible in our programs.

What might special area classes look like (i.e., P.E., Art, Library, Music) to minimize risks to both students and staff?

Special area teachers teach several different classes within the same instructional day, thus theoretically having a higher risk of exposure. We anticipate that specials will be traveling to classrooms to minimize the number of students occupying a classroom over the course of one day.

Social distancing guidelines require 12-feet (rather than six) for any physical activity that could cause heavy breathing and any musical activity that involves singing or projecting air into an instrument. This will limit the amount of in-person instruction available to students.

In what ways might building schedules be altered to reduce student and staff movement and maximize learning?

Building principals and their building-level teams are reviewing potential schedules to limit student movement if students are allowed to return to school facilities for in-person learning. We are also exploring one-way hallway flow configurations to minimize face to face contact exposure. These plans are currently being developed and will be shared in future updates if students are allowed to return to in-person

instruction. Schedules are being developed with staggered start times and consideration is being given to schedules that reduce the number of passing times at the middle and high school.

What will protocols be for teachers who travel between or among buildings to promote health and safety?

Our staffing configurations will be dependent upon potential in-person schooling and the number of students who opt for fully remote learning. Our goal is to minimize the number of staff who have to travel between or among buildings.

TRANSPORTATION

What are the protocols in place for student and staff safety on school buses?

State guidance has shifted regularly in regards to student transportation. Currently, we know that students will be required to wear masks on the bus at all times and students will be limited to one per seat, except in cases where siblings ride the same bus.

We currently believe we can accommodate approximately 25-30 students on a regularly-sized school bus with all students sitting in one seat with social distancing enforced. Moreover, hand sanitizer has been prohibited on buses as it is a flammable liquid.

How has the district worked with BC Transit to ensure that public transportation is also adhering to guidelines?

BCSD is meeting with BC Transit to discuss safety protocols and implement these protocols on buses our students utilize.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND ACADEMIC LEARNING

If a hybrid model is an option, what might a weekly schedule look like for students attending a combination of in-person learning and remote learning?

BCSD has identified a hybrid model that provides a combination of in-person instruction with remote learning options.

The hybrid model is being applied at the middle and high school for all grade levels. We are evaluating which grade levels at the elementary level will be hybrid as well, with the hopes of being able to bring in primary level students more often. Our hybrid model will look as follows:

- Cohort A: In-person Monday/Tuesday, Remote half day Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.
- Cohort B: Remote Monday, Tuesday, and half day Wednesday In-person Thursday and Friday.

Under this model, BCSD envisions Wednesday as a half-day remote learning day for all students. Wednesday is important to this plan as it would empty our buildings of students in-between Cohorts to allow for deep cleaning and desks, chairs, etc., to sit for 24 hours before being used by different students. It will also provide our faculty time to reach out to families and students, as well as, plan for their implementation of simultaneous modes of learning. These models are contingent upon the Governor's decision on permitting students to return in-person learning.

If remote learning is selected for my student(s), what may their weekly schedule look like? Will they have direct, ongoing communication with their teachers?

We are exploring various remote learning models depending upon the Governor's decision during the August 1st week. One thing we know for sure: this will not reflect last Spring's "emergency learning" environment. It will be more robust in terms of curriculum, assessment, expectations, and teacher contact. We are accessing our technology to determine the extent to which synchronous learning, meaning, teaching occurring live in front of the student is possible. Fully remote learning will most likely be a combination of learning directly from the teacher and from recorded materials provided by the teacher.

How will BCSD support student mental health and well-being when school begins?

Our first weeks of school - for all students - will be focused on social-emotional learning. Our students and staff have been simultaneously experiencing a global

pandemic, a very public admonishment of systemic racism, and a global recession; they need time, space and resources to process this and return to school in ways that support ongoing learning.

What are the expectations around student attendance and how will this be monitored?

Attendance will be taken daily and monitored as it has been in the past. Daily attendance expectations will be the same as they were before March 16, 2020 when “emergency learning” began with COVID-19.

March through June was an “emergency” situation and this school year will carry the same expectations for attendance, learning, and engagement as all other school years have. We have high expectations for our staff and students and will work hard to meet them regardless of what learning looks like this year.

What guidance exists for serving students with disabilities during this time?

We are committed to meeting the requirements of student IEP’s. In planning for continuity of learning, school districts must consider ways of ensuring that the planned activities are accessible to students with disabilities, including English Language Learners with disabilities. We are employing strategies to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to the continuity of learning and receive educational benefits that are comparable to those received by others in the program and modified, or separate, aids and services necessary to provide access to students with disabilities. Where technology itself imposes a barrier to access or where educational materials simply are not available in an accessible format, educators may still meet their legal obligations by providing children with disabilities equally effective alternate access to the curriculum or services provided to other students.

BCSD is exploring several in-person and remote learning models if school facilities are reopened to students this fall. We recognize that some students with disabilities may be able to attend in-person school at more frequent intervals under a hybrid model as class sizes are smaller by nature. All self-contained classrooms will provide daily, in-person instruction.

The latest NYSED guidance concerning services during the academic year may be found here: [Memo: Provision of Services to Students with Disabilities During Statewide School Closures Due to Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) O](#)

Will students still receive their mandated services in a hybrid or remote model?

Yes. If school facilities are open to students this fall, in-person services may be possible with social distancing and appropriate PPE. We are exploring ways to sanitize manipulatives between student use or provide additional materials to staff.

As in the Spring, teletherapy may also be an option. NYSED Office of the Professions guidance on Telepractice may be found here: [NYS Professions with Telepractice Guidance](#).

Will athletics, fine and performing arts, and extracurricular activities continue?

Currently, Fall Sports season has been delayed to September 21st as the earliest possible start date. All other seasons may be condensed, as well. [NYSPHSAA To Delay Fall Sports Start Date & Cancel Fall Championships](#)

Performing Arts and extracurricular activities are being evaluated based on several factors, including their feasibility in a hybrid or fully remote environment, scheduling needs, and safety risks. More information will be forthcoming as additional state guidance is released.

How is the district working with substitute teachers to ascertain availability and train them on these protocols?

The BCSD personnel office is contacting all substitute teachers to ascertain their availability to work in schools if in-person student learning is allowed to resume. In addition, all substitute teachers and support staff will be training on mask wearing, hand hygiene, social distancing, and other COVID-19 related protocols. This will be a requirement before they are able to begin substituting. Every effort will be made to assign substitutes to no more than 2 buildings to limit their exposure and transmittal of the virus.

If students opt for fully remote learning, will they have the opportunity to meet their teacher in person before the school year begins?

Promoting student engagement will be our top priority regardless of which model is implemented this year. We will work on safe means to encourage this type of in-person meeting, with appropriate social distancing, if remote learning ensues for all students or for those who opt for fully remote learning.

Will there be consistent platforms for online learning and communication from school to families this year?

Yes. Google Classroom will be the consistent digital learning platform for all BCSD staff and students this year. We are working on a streamlined system where individual teacher Google Classrooms are linked to a single building-level Google Classroom. Moreover, BCSD will be investing in the Remind App to ensure consistent communication procedures and secure phone calling options.

What options exist for families whose students attend BOCES programs such as P-Tech for remote and in-person learning?

BCSD is working with Broome-Tioga BOCES to develop systems for students who part-of or all of their day in a BOCES program. Some programs, like P-Tech, have historically asked students to travel to and from the BOCES campus during the school day. We are working with our BOCES partners to develop protocols and discuss remote learning options where students can remain on BCSD campus for at least some of their instructional components. BOCES is following the same schedule as BCSD. More information will be forthcoming.

How is remote learning different this Fall from what took place last Spring? What are the expectations for teachers, students, and families?

Last Spring, all districts were thrust into emergency learning with 36 hours notice, beginning on March 16th. This year will be different regardless of which learning model occurs. Also, the infection rates were much higher last spring and no clear protocols were being required of districts. Attendance will be taken on a daily basis, grading will be more accountable than the Spring, and Grades 3-8 exams and Regents Exams are still scheduled.

Teachers will be reporting to school everyday. Remote learning under the hybrid model will be occurring from the school site, and in accordance with a building-wide schedule. This means, students will be required to log-in at specific times for each of their classes. The district is also developing schedules for days that may become remote for all students if infection rate begins to climb.

Learning expectations will be similar to pre-COVID conditions; however, we are working to prioritize curricular goals to address learning gaps that grew in size as in-person learning closures were extended. We are working to ensure that this school year's expectations for students are high, socially, emotionally, and academically.

In what ways is the district looking to leverage technology to promote as much student-teacher learning engagement in a remote environment?

Consistency is our first goal. By committing to Google Classroom and Remind, BCSD will be able to build capacity with staff, students, and family around one consistent learning platform. We believe that this consistently will allow for best practices to emerge that can then be taught across our district to promote learning engagement. This was one of the lessons we learned from last Spring; too many platforms caused confusion and hindered our effectiveness. One common, consistent platform was a result of that learning. We also recognize that when lessons are posted, students have shared that hearing their own teacher's voice on the recording is more engaging than listening to a pre-recorded lesson. Faculty will be engaging in three days of professional development around increasing student engagement with the use of technology at the start of the school year.

COMMUNICATION

How is BCSD collaborating with the local health department?

BCSD has appointed Eric Wilson, Executive Director of Human Resources and Operations, as the district's Covid-19 Coordinator. One of his key duties in this role is to be the direct point of contact with our local health department. We are collaborating with our local health department on all reopening plans and safety protocols.

How can I provide input on the district's reopening plans?

BCSD launched community surveys during the July 21st week and garnered approximately 2000 responses. In addition, our faculty survey had over 700 responses. These responses were important in helping to shape our initial planning around community feeling and perception of school reopening. As plans evolve and develop with more information being available, we will continue to survey community and faculty.

Beyond formal surveys, we have created two Google Forms for faculty and community to leave their ongoing input. Their links are here:

Community Follow-Up: <https://forms.gle/zbrMW7yzNQjk2W2z7>

Staff Follow-Up:

<https://forms.gle/46EfXkCD8AiQKR6>

In what ways will BCSD utilize its website and App to promote consistent communication with families?

Our district's COVID-19 webpage ([COVID-19 Updates 2020-2021](#)) will continue to contain resources and postings of information disseminated to families on Monday's and Friday's after 3:00 pm each week. These communications will vary in scope and any critical information will be accompanied by a robo call to all families to alert them to the new message. In order to receive the Monday and Friday updates, please be sure your email address is on file with your child's main office and that you have downloaded the district app. Search Binghamton city School District on either Google Play or Apple app store. Additionally, the Superintendent will continue to issue updates and guidance once a Month on the second Wednesday of the month.