

Pandemic Planning: Information & Guidance for State Charter Schools

JULY 24, 2020

**State Charter Schools Commission
of Georgia**





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Introduction

State charter schools, like all local school districts, have flexibility to implement a pandemic plan that best suits the needs of their individual communities. Through broad flexibility waivers, state charter schools can already implement many of the recommended practices, such as modifying school calendars, instructional time and methods.

As the oversight body to state charter schools, the SCSC has an obligation to ensure that each school's plan aligns with state and federal requirements. To that end, **each state charter school must submit a pandemic plan for review to the SCSC by July 24th. Throughout the 2020-21 school year, schools must notify the SCSC upon altering their pandemic plan or shifting to a different phase of the plan based on level of community spread.** Pandemic plans must be submitted to Cerrone Lockett, SCSC General Counsel, at Cerrone.lockett@scsc.georgia.gov.

NOTE: There is no prescribed format for your school's pandemic plan.

The State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia (SCSC) has compiled this document to consolidate resources and information for state charter schools as they develop and adapt pandemic plans for the 2020-2021 school year. This document contains links to guidance and information from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE); U.S. Department of Education (US Ed); Georgia Department of Public Health (GaDPH); and, the Center for Disease Control (CDC). It is updated weekly, as needed, to reflect the most current guidance and information available.

General Information

- Governor Kemp issued an [EXECUTIVE ORDER](#) on July 15, 2020. Notable provisions include:
 - **Effective Date: July 15, 2020 through July 31, 2020 (11:59 p.m.)**
 - Residents and visitors are *strongly encouraged* to wear face coverings.
 - The Order does not prevent schools from requiring faculty and staff to attend meetings or other necessary activities at a school or facility for the purpose of supporting distance learning, research, administration, maintenance, or preparation for the 2020-2021 school year.
 - School district are not required to comply with the ban on gatherings, but must implement, during the effective dates of the Order, implement additional measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Among staff and students while present on campus.
- GaDOE, in partnership with GaDPH, developed [GEORGIA'S PATH TO RECOVERY FOR K-12 SCHOOLS](#) to support districts and communities in developing plans for reopening schools. The guidance document provides a tiered approach with clear, actionable steps that are advisable prior to returning to school buildings during the 2020-2021 school year.
- On June 13, 2020, the GaDPH released [RETURN TO SCHOOL GUIDANCE AFTER COVID-19 ILLNESS OR EXPOSURE](#), which is recommended for use in decision-making regarding opening for in-person education.
- On May 13, 2020, the CDC issued [CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS](#) on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in school settings.
- In the July 13, 2020 Superintendents Meeting, the following information was emphasized:
 - GaDPH is leading contact tracing efforts. Schools are expected to cooperate with these efforts and report confirmed cases of COVID-19 to local public health departments.
 - Re-opening with a physical presence is recommended. School should encourage the use of face coverings. Schools **CAN** require students to wear face coverings but must provide alternatives for certain student populations.
 - Schools should not encourage testing before in-person reporting. Schools should encourage self-screening (i.e. at home temperature checks).

New Guidance

- Updated CDC Guidance: [PREPARING K-12 SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS FOR A SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL IN FALL 2020](#) (July 24, 2020)
- Georgia's K-12 Restart Working Group for Distance Learning & Professional Learning have developed [THIS](#) support document, which focuses on developing the learning community, re-establishing expectations, transitions and routines, a statewide system for coherent instructional resources, addressing individual learner needs, Digital learning technologies & non-digital alternatives, and professional learning supports for educators and families.
- On July 22, 2020, GaDOE issued updated guidance on [DISTANCE LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING](#)
- On July 22, 2020, GaDOE issued updated guidance on [MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS](#)
- As referenced in the July 13, 2020 Superintendents Meeting, the GaDPH issued a list of Public Health Directors, including contact information. You can access the list [HERE](#).
- On June 21, 2020, the State School Superintendent released [THIS STATEMENT](#) in support of school districts across Georgia. "Local districts have authority to chart their course for upcoming school year. Our role is to support them."
- SCSC June 13, 2020 Pandemic Planning presentation [HERE](#). Responses to supplemental inquiries are detailed below:
 - **Model Policies.** The SCSC does not maintain a comprehensive database of sample policies. However, we remain available to assist schools in policy development. Please note that the SCSC only reviews policies for legal compliance. It is each school's responsibility to develop policies and procedures that meet the needs of its unique population.
 - **Requiring Masks.** Schools **CAN** require students to wear masks. (Keep in mind of the need to provide alternatives for certain student populations).
 - **In-person Reporting for Staff.** Schools can require staff to report in-person to provide virtual instruction. (Keep in mind that some staff may be entitled to reasonable accommodations and/or may have rights under federal law.) For guidance on employees reluctant to return to work, please see the "[WHAT TO DO WHEN SCARED WORKERS DON'T REPORT TO WORK DUE TO COVID-19?](#)"
 - **Contact Tracing.** We understand that regional departments of health are leading contact tracing initiatives. However, in the absence of complete clarity, we recommend that schools

report confirmed cases to their local health departments and the DPH until more direction is available.

- **Student Absences.** There is no State Board rule or Georgia law that restricts the number of excused absences a student can accumulate. Rule 160-5-1-.10 establishes the minimum circumstances upon which a school MUST excuse absence.

Community Spread

- The level of community spread shall be determined by your local health department. Pandemic plans should respond to circumstances requiring temporary school closure, enhanced mitigation measures, and preventative practices.
- GaDOE, in partnership with the Governor's Office, is working with the GaDPH to obtain county-by-county reports/maps of level of community spread to guide school restart efforts.
- The DPH point of contact is Sara Kroening, Deputy Chief Nurse of School Health sara.kroening@dph.ga.gov.

From the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

- Visit the CDC website for updated information [HERE](#), including:
 - COVID-19 [FACT SHEETS](#) in multiple languages;
 - Guidance for [CHILDCARE, SCHOOLS, AND YOUTH PROGRAMS](#); and,
 - [READINESS AND PLANNING TOOL](#)

From the Georgia Department of Public Health

- Visit the GaDPH website for daily updates to the [COVID-19 STATUS REPORT](#), and additional guidance including:
 - [GUIDANCE ON MANAGING ESSENTIAL ITEM PICK-UP](#); and,
 - [FACE COVERING RECOMMENDATIONS](#).

Communication Resources

- The Georgia School Boards Association developed a [PANDEMIC RECOVERY CONSIDERATIONS, RE-ENTRY AND RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS](#) guidance document, which assists schools in developing effective communication plans.

Instructional Models

State charter schools have broad flexibility to establish their instructional models, in-person reporting schedules, track remote/virtual attendance, and set their academic calendars. Review the following additional rules and resources as you develop a pandemic plan for your school:

- [GADOE STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND VIRTUAL/DISTANCE/REMOTE LEARNING FAQ](#) (June 26, 2020)
- FTE Count: [SBOE RULE 160-5-1-.07](#)
- State Board of Education June 18 [RESOLUTION](#) exempting LEAs from minimum instructional time, school day, and school year requirements, *upon submission of an amended school calendar*.
- [CONNECTIVITY AND DEVICES RESTART GUIDANCE](#)
- [DIGITAL LEARNING PLANNING: INFORMATION FOR GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS](#)
- [DISTANCE LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING](#) (UPDATED 7/22)
- The Privacy & Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) released [GUIDANCE](#) on protecting student privacy while using online educational services.

Recommended Processes and Procedures

- [GEORGIA'S PATH TO RECOVERY FOR K-12 SCHOOLS](#)
- [FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND TRANSPORTATION](#) (UPDATED 7/10)
- [STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND VIRTUAL/DISTANCE/REMOTE LEARNING FAQ](#)
- [MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS](#) (UPDATED 7/22)

Legal Compliance

To ensure legally compliant operations, schools should review the following policies and legal requirements.

- **Infectious Disease Policy**
 - **SBOE Rule 160-1-3.03**
- **Staff and Student Attendance Policies**
 - **SBOE Rule 160-5-1-.10**
 - **SBOE Rule 160-4-2-.31** (Hospital Homebound Services)
- **Enrollment and Registration Procedures**
 - **O.C.G.A § 20-2-771** (The statute allows the responsible official of any school or facility to grant a 30-calendar day waiver of the certification of immunization requirement for a justified reason.)
 - **GaDPH Rule 511-2-2-.02**
 - **NOTE:** GaDPH revised its rules and postponed implementation of the high school meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) booster dose requirement from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021. DPH provided two versions of parent letters in both [ENGLISH](#) and [SPANISH](#) with further details.
- **Students and Staff with Disabilities**
 - Section 504, ADA, and IDEA policies
 - Reasonable Accommodations
 - Mask Requirements
- **Required Legal Notices**
 - Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
 - Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFRCA)
 - **NOTE:** Public employers and government entities, including state charter schools, must display [THIS POSTER](#).
 - U.S. Dept. of Labor [GUIDANCE](#) for implementation of emergency paid leave, sick leave and FFCRA leave.
- **Other Legal Requirements**
 - Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA)
 - [OSHA GUIDANCE FOR RETURNING TO WORK](#)
 - National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)

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- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
 - [WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE ADA, THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND COVID-19](#)
 - [PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT](#)
 - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
 - **SBOE Rule 160-1-3-.03**
 - U.S. Dept. of Education issued the following guidance on FERPA compliance during COVID-19:
 - [MARCH 2020 FAQs](#)
 - [MARCH 30, 2020 WEBINAR](#)
 - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA).

Additional Resources

- [FACT SHEET: ADDRESSING THE RISK OF COVID 19 IN SCHOOLS WHILE PROTECTING THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF STUDENTS](#) (MARCH 16, 2020)
- [SUPPLEMENTAL FACT SHEET ADDRESSING THE RISK OF COVID 19 IN PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS WHILE SERVING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES](#) (MARCH 21, 2020)
- [SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WITH DISTANCE LEARNING](#) (APRIL 2020)
- [WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE ADA, THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND COVID-19](#)
- [PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT](#)

Facilities Resources

- [FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND TRANSPORTATION](#)
- [PPE SUPPLIERS LIST](#)
- GaDOE released [GUIDANCE](#) related to “In-person Reporting and Staff Safety.”

Meals and Transportation

- [PREPARING AND SERVING SCHOOL MEALS](#) (UPDATED 7/10)
- [FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND TRANSPORTATION](#) (UPDATED 7/10)
- [CDC REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PUBLIC SPACES, WORKPLACES, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, AND HOMES.](#)
- [CDC GUIDANCE FOR THE CLEANING AND DISINFECTION FOR NON-EMERGENCY TRANSPORT VEHICLES](#) .

Other Resources

- The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities launched the Georgia Covid-19 Emotional Support Line. The phone number is 866-399-8938. Additional details and resources are listed on the [FLYER](#).