

RE- OPENING



**Considerations for
Reopening Our Schools**

**from
An Educator Task Force**

Intent of This Document

On April 30, 2020, outgoing NC State Superintendent, Mark Johnson, announced he had formed a task force to address the reopening of schools after COVID-19. I imagine the task force members had a great wealth of experience and knowledge; however, the task force had only ***one*** teacher on the team. **In order to hear from educators on the front lines and to give more educators a voice,** I pulled together a small group of teachers, active and retired, from across the state to make suggestions for reopening based on their experience.

Our task force has no authority or responsibility.

The members came together numerous times to give their input. They were told to imagine *all* scenarios and not let potential barriers, such as funding, limit their ideas. The group focused on the needs and well being of their students and other school personnel. *Although we have strived to include input from multiple stakeholders in a variety of positions, we realize that there will be situations we haven't considered and unforeseen realities for all of us as we approach re-opening.* First and foremost, our goal has been to give educators and personnel a voice. Now, this important work is left to those with actual authority - in particular the General Assembly, the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. We leave it to these stakeholders to determine if any of these suggestions are useful given our present set of circumstances, and we look forward to working with them if they would like to include these or other perspectives in their future work.

On June 8th, NCDHHS released their [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) with 3 levels of planning. Plan A is minimal social distancing. Plan B is moderate social distancing, and Plan C is remote learning only. While our suggestions are not categorized by levels, we have organized them by who is responsible: state, district or school. Again, these considerations are not meant to be prescriptive but suggestions from educators on the front lines. ***We all want our students and personnel to feel comfortable and safe when returning to school.*** Thank you for the opportunity to hear directly from educators.

Dr. Jen Mangrum
Candidate for NC State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Task Force Members

Mireya Ruiz is a 5th grade teacher at Lake Myra Elementary School in Wake County. She is in her 6th year of teaching and has also taught second and fifth grades in Chatham County. She served as a panelist for the DRIVE Summit: Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education and is currently involved in the planning of the Leadership Institute for Future Teachers program (LIFT) at NC State.

Yazmin Ruiz is a 3rd grade Dual Language teacher in Chatham County. She is in her 6th year of teaching. Yazmin is currently working on her Master's Degree in Elementary Education with a math concentration at UNCG.

Rodney D. Pierce is a 5th-year teacher who is entering his second year teaching 8th grade Social Studies in Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools. Pierce taught 6th grade and 8th grade Social Studies along with Civics and Economics from 2015 to 2019 in Halifax County Schools. The 2019 NC Council for the Social Studies Teacher of the Year, Pierce is the Teacher Fellow for the CREED (Center for Racial Equity Education) Equity Fellowship, a member of the Carolina Public Humanities Advisory Board, the NCACT (North Carolina Association for Gifted and Talented) Talent Delayed/Talent Denied Advisory Committee, and was recently elected to the NCCSS Board of Directors.

Gene Flanagan was born and raised in North Carolina. He holds a Bachelor's degree from UNC-CH in Education and a Master's degree from ECU in Educational Administration. Gene taught math and science at Parkwood Elementary School for 10 years before he left to become Assistant Principal at Northwoods Park Middle School for 5 years. He has served in the Superintendent's Office as an Evaluator for the NC Initial Certification Program for 3 years. After leaving Onslow County Schools, Gene was an Assistant Principal at Brewster Middle School on Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base for 20 years. Gene is retired and has a daughter who will be a rising freshman at Jacksonville High School this fall.

Julie Noblitt is a former 3rd grade student of Dr. Mangrum's who was inspired to become an educator due to her positive experience with then Mrs. Mangrum. Julie Noblitt has teaching degrees and licenses in K-6 elementary education and K-12 library science both from Appalachian State University. She taught four years in 4th grade and ten years in 2nd grade in Buncombe County Schools. Currently, Mrs. Noblitt is a media coordinator at Asheville Middle School. She is National Board certified in literacy, a member of NCAE and NCSLMA.

Valencia Abbott is a high school Social Studies teacher at Rockingham Early College High School and this is her 16th year in education. Valencia has had the honor of being named Teacher of the Year at two different schools. Valencia also serves on the board for Professional Educators of North Carolina (PENC).

Task Force Members, continued

Kevin Poirier is a multi-classroom leader at West Charlotte High School. Kevin has worked at West Charlotte High School for eight years, four of those as a high school science teacher, two as a technology facilitator, and two as a multi-classroom leader. Kevin received his Masters in Educational Leadership along with a NC Administrator's license from Queens University in Charlotte. He is also the current Chair of the Mecklenburg County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council.

LaToya Caesar is the District Liaison for Equity and Engagement for Iredell Statesville Schools. She is a former Principal, Assessor for Aspiring Principals, Assistant Principal and Special Education Teacher. LaToya has had the honor of serving as an educator for 12 years, and appeared before the Senate in support of the ESSA legislation. She is the recipient of the New Leaders Robert's Award for School Innovation. She is the co-founder of Partnership for Equity, an organization committed to dismantling inequitable systems through education, advocacy, and youth development.

Tyler Swanson is entering his third year as a Special Education teacher at Enloe Magnet High School. Before Tyler entered the school education field, he was a NC NAACP Moral Monday Arrestee and former NC NAACP Field Secretary. Tyler Swanson worked with the NC NAACP from 2013-2018 under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and Rev. T. Anthony Spearman. Tyler is a member of the NC Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival Steering Committee Board Member and Wake NCAE Board of Directors Member.

Jeremy Tucker is the Director of Arts Education for Durham Public Schools. Prior to his tenure with DPS he was an elementary and then later high school music teacher for 14 years in both Wilson and Wake County. He is a past NC Regional Teacher of the Year. Jeremy has also served as the Music and Theatre Arts Ed. consultant at NCDPI. Additionally, he is the Artistic Director for the Raleigh Boychoir. Jeremy is the president-elect for the NC chapter of the American Choral Directors Association.

Jen Mangrum is an Associate Professor at UNC- Greensboro in Teacher Education and in her 12th year. Jen spent 4 years at NC State and prior to that 14 years as an elementary teacher. Jen is the Democratic nominee for NC State Superintendent.

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Considerations for State Office Stakeholders

North Carolina General Assembly

North Carolina State Board of Education

*North Carolina Department of Public
Instruction*

Health and Safety

The NC General Assembly will allocate funding for:

- all necessary medical PPE and supplies including (no touch) thermometers, gloves, scrubs or lab coats, hand sanitizer, bed covering, etc. for all school personnel state-wide.
- extra custodians or cleaning teams in each district as needed
- a COVID clinic which includes at least a nurse, social worker and counselor for each school state-wide.
- administering ACES survey (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- transportation; ie.extra busses and/or drivers
- hazard pay for ESPs who are required to work in high risk positions.
- a series of age-appropriate training videos for students explaining the new health and safety expectations of students during the school day.
- extended learning opportunities during summer or when students experience extended time away from school.

The NC State Board of Education will create policy:

- that allows teacher workdays to include a work from home option.
- for personnel with documentation of pre-existing conditions, or those who are in settings where they may be jeopardizing the health of another, to be given an alternative assignment within the district.

The District will:

- provide and distribute PPE for students/staff as needed and must meet CDC standards and guidelines.
- develop procedures for remote teaching and learning for personnel and/or students with COVID symptoms (eg. fever).

Communication

The NC Department of Public Instruction

- will create a statewide Task Force that meets monthly to assess and adapt to the needs of districts. The members will represent all of North Carolina. Membership should include educators, ESP and parents.
- in partnership with SBE, commits to transparency and communicates up-to-date information in regards to community outbreaks and policy changes.
- will host virtual conversations for districts to share information and receive comments and concerns.
- will stay informed with DHHS and share key information and/or changes with districts.

Instruction

The NC General Assembly will allocate funding for:

- two personnel in every K-3 classroom during instructional sessions. *Research confirms that one-on-one and small group instruction is more effective at raising achievement than other interventions, programs or curriculums.*
- more personnel (may include substitutes) to meet the needs on busses and in areas deemed necessary by districts.
- high quality professional development for educators who supplement instruction with distance learning. *Research has consistently shown that full-time virtual learning has less effective outcomes. When virtual learning is required, synchronous online learning increases understanding and promotes social engagement.*
- each district to provide tech support for parents, students and school personnel.

The NC Department of Public Instruction will:

- in partnership with practicing classroom teachers, vet online instructional tools and make recommendations for remote learning.
- in partnership with NCCAT or other state organizations, provide high quality professional development for school personnel before schools open, as well as throughout the pandemic. Professional development should focus on teaching as well as how to address the social and emotional needs of our children.
- trust our professional educators and staff to measure growth of all students.
- provide support to districts as regards the development of evaluation tools to be used for diagnostic and coaching purposes for both at school and remote learning.
- in partnership with SBE, make recommendations for high quality extended learning opportunities during summer break.
- provide support for districts to continue to offer dance, music, theatre arts and visual arts courses as part of a well-rounded curriculum.

Equity and Access

The NC General Assembly will allocate funding for:

- devices and hot spots for every child in NC to participate in remote learning.
- all middle schools to become 1:1 who are not already.
- contractual partnerships in all districts in order to provide access to tech support for all parents, students and school personnel.
- technology needs/shortfalls, ie: computer repairs, chargers, lost technology, and
- will waive high stakes testing.

The NC Department of Public Instruction will:

- designate which curriculum standards are critical, so educators can focus on critical content only.
- promote Project Based Learning for 70% of instruction in either a virtual or traditional learning environment.
- in partnership with SBE, provide guidelines and support for home-based instruction for students who are unable to attend school during COVID-19.
- in partnership with SBE, develop strategies for addressing racism and provide support for the disproportionate number of African American students being affected by the COVID-19.

Social and Emotional Wellness

The NC Department of Public Instruction will:

- establish a social/emotional support component to the evaluation tool (beyond just the establishment of relationships) with students.
- provide resources for the social and emotional needs of every student.

Considerations for the District Level

Health and Safety

Our school districts will develop a plan and/or policy that requires:

- at least one extra adult person on each bus to monitor for safety.
- transportation to and from school for students to practice social distancing on school buses requiring bus drivers to wear masks (and gloves if necessary, ie. allergies)
- students to wear masks (and gloves if necessary)
- proper sanitization of school buses pre and post route daily. Provide every driver with sanitizing supplies, masks, disinfectant, wipes, gloves, etc.
- a quarantine spot if a student starts exhibiting symptoms of illness.
- bus drivers with touchless thermometers to perform temperature checks of students who advise they do not feel well during travel to or from school.

Our school districts will develop:

- procedures for remote teaching and learning for personnel and/or students displaying COVID symptoms (eg. fever)
- district guidelines to address the new procedural requirements for fire drills, lockdown, natural disaster preparation.
- a plan for custodial safety and cleaning duties that includes:
 - providing each custodian with PPE, sanitizing supplies, masks, disinfectant, wipes, gloves, etc. to clean and disinfect rooms and surfaces each day and throughout the day.
 - Hallway sanitizing stations

Communication

Our school districts will develop a communication plan and/or policy that:

- informs parents and personnel each week of the number of students or school personnel who tested positive and which schools they attend.
- is data-driven to gauge the needs of parents, school communities and school personnel.
- will advise families and communities of procedures for steps taken in delivering food to students while this method is still being utilized.
- advises parents and community members of procedures taken throughout the day (including on busses) to ensure safety and cleanliness for students and personnel.

Our school districts will create a Pandemic District Task Force.

- The majority of members should be educators representing each school.
- The task force should meet weekly to make adjustments to the district pandemic plan as needed and communicate those changes to all stakeholders.
- Members should be paid a stipend for participation.

Instruction

Our school districts will develop an instructional plan and:

- accommodate teachers so that their schedules allow for professional development on remote teaching and learning.
- develop student scheduling that meets CDC guidelines for social distancing.
- will carry this out by possibly:
 - implementing a four-day instructional week with the fifth day for teacher planning and professional development. Teachers may use planning to manage changes from COVID19.
 - using a “Mobile Personnel Team” to handle classes on days the grade level team is planning or in PD. For example on Monday, Kindergarten and First grade classes are covered by the Mobile Team; all other grades have classes as usual.
 - having each class offer a morning instructional session and an afternoon instructional session. The students are divided into sessions. Students who aren’t included in the instructional session are on school property participating in specials such as physical education, art, lunch, music, technology instruction, remote learning or other electives.
- provide training (media specialists, tech facilitators) for LMSs (learning management systems) and other tech tools.

Equity and Access

Our school districts will develop an equity and access plan to:

- disperse CARES funds in an equitable manner.
- prioritize the needs of schools based on which NC DHHS plan schools are operating under.
 - Plan A - operating under minimal social distancing
 - Plan B- operating under moderate social distancing
 - Plan C - remote learning only

Social and Emotional Wellness

Our school districts will develop a social and emotional wellness plan in order to:

- provide families, personnel and students with access to resources for mental health assistance.
- require schools to generate plans for reducing stress for students and personnel.
- prioritize content for instructional time in order to create time for managing social and emotional wellness.

Considerations for the School Level

Health and Safety

Our schools will develop a health and safety plan to:

- provide access to PPE each day for all school personnel and students including new masks daily or the ability to have PPE washed and dried daily.
- develop a schedule for hand-washing and other sanitary measures for students to be implemented hourly throughout the day.
- keep student movement as minimal as possible throughout the day. This may include minimizing teacher rotation, limiting the number of students in the hallway at a time, not allowing students to congregate in common areas, or adapting the school day so that students do not cross paths with other students. Some possibilities may be:
 - students spend all day in one classroom (math Monday, science Tuesday, ELA Wednesday, SS Thursday, two electives Friday)
 - principals reduce number of teachers on an academic team (four person teams to two person teams)
 - students stay in place and teachers rotate classrooms.
 - Utilizing technology to deliver instruction to multiple rooms at one time
- encourage teachers to educate students and utilize coaching videos on social distancing techniques to proceed throughout the building.
- use large rooms as classrooms when possible; gyms, media, cafeterias, etc.
- ensure that halls are labeled so students always walk on the right side.
- limit non-essential visitors in the school building.
- deliver lunch to classrooms to minimize movement and large gathering.
- allow students to bring their own labeled water bottles to avoid water fountains.

Communication

Our schools will develop a communication plan to ensure that:

- administrators are communicating regularly with parents about the status of school safety and new procedures in multiple languages if appropriate.
- school personnel are in close contact with families to survey needs or make adaptations for each child as needed.
- administrators are communicating to personnel the positive results of the procedures and their input.

Instruction

Our schools will develop an instructional plan to ensure that:

- students are coached and mentored about the best use of online tools.
- teachers should periodically assess the needs of students that are home-bound due to COVID-19.
- as weather permits, classes are held outside.
- students who are home-bound due to COVID exposure or being immunocompromised are offered an option to stream classes online or see recorded lessons of the same content and material.
- staff meetings, summer PD and open houses are virtual.
- students identified for exceptional services receive modifications as identified in their IEPs, and that those IEPs are revised as needed for our new learning context.

Equity/Excellence/Access

Our schools will develop an equity, excellence and access plan to ensure that:

- special courses (art, music, et al) are planned together with teachers in order to integrate into projects.
- students are assessed with rubrics when possible.
- all students are provided with equitable access to the arts, physical education, AIG and other specialized courses.
- a task force exists in each school to provide daily feedback to the district representative. This team should be composed of multiple stakeholders including: the administration, teachers from different department areas, program directors, custodians and food nutrition staff. This team will provide the district with updates and current school needs.

Social and Emotional Wellness

Our schools will implement a social and emotional wellness plan which, when implemented, would include:

- a recess schedule of at least 30 minutes daily of recess or other physical activity for mental health, outside if weather permits.
- a schedule for Social and Emotional response activities through arts classes(dance, music, theatre arts, and visual arts)
- a plan for daily conversation and reflection. This may be virtual or face-to-face. It may be in the form of mindfulness education about COVID 19, stress management, or open discussion.
- instructional time focused on learning not assessing.