

OPERATING SCHOOLS IN THE ERA OF COVID-19



Rationale

Seventh-day Adventist Schools have always believed in providing the best possible care for students entrusted to their programs, and this time of pandemic is no exception. As the general public struggles with questions as to when and how to reopen and what life will look like when reopening does occur, our schools will not be left to wonder about their roles. This document is intended to give guidance to difficult questions, such as

- When will our schools reopen?
- How will we keep students safe when we do reopen?
- What will we do if our students or personnel are found to test positive for COVID-19?

All recommendations in this document are made after considering Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations* and after consulting with other education leaders in the Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

When do we reopen?

Seventh-day Adventist Schools in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will reopen their buildings for the 2020-2021 school year once the following benchmarks have been reached:

- The Pennsylvania State Government has given permission for schools within the state to reopen
- Local Pennsylvania municipalities have given permission for schools in their area to reopen
- A minimum number of school personnel needed to adequately operate the school program have been healthy – showing no symptoms of COVID-19 – for 14 consecutive days. Any personnel who has not been healthy for 14 consecutive days at the beginning of school must stay home until they have reached this benchmark
- At least half the student body has been healthy – showing no symptoms of COVID-19 – for 14 days, with their parents providing written documentation to this affect. Any students who have not been healthy for at least 14 consecutive days must stay home until this benchmark has been reached
- All surfaces in the school, including manipulative and tools handled by any personnel or student, must be disinfected with cleaning agents that meet the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines (see <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>). When cleaning, the guidelines recommended by the CDC will be followed (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>)

How and how often will schools be cleaned once buildings are reopened?

During the school day general surfaces (desks, tables, doorknobs, etc.) will be cleaned and disinfected using sanitizing wipes twice daily. At the close of every school day the school will have a general cleaning, where all surfaces and restrooms are cleaned. At the close of every school week a thorough disinfecting of the school will take place in accordance with the CDC guidelines* listed above. If the school operates its own transportation, vehicles will be disinfected after each transportation run.

How will personnel be trained?

School personnel have already been engaging in weekly meetings with the Pennsylvania Conference Office of Education problem solving a variety of COVID-related issues, including these guidelines. Further training will be conducted during 2019-2020 Post-Session Meetings and 2020-2021 Pre-Session Meetings. As a part of this training, staff will be presented with the following checklist from the CDC*: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/schools-checklist-teachers.pdf>.

How will students be trained?

During the first days of school time will be taken to train students in the following:

- Proper hygiene
- Proper use of hand sanitizer
- The use of the new conference-wide distance learning platform (see below)
- Proper illness protocol
 - Telling someone when you feel ill
 - Sneezing into elbow or tissue
 - Physical distancing
 - Etc.

What new practices will be in place at school?*

- When school buildings are being reopened, all personnel and students will have their temperature taken upon entering the building with a no-touch thermometer. This practice will be in place for the first week of school following a reopening
- If one does not already exist, an area of the building will be designated as the “sick room” or “sick area”. If a student or a member of the personnel are displaying symptoms, they will be brought to this area to be evaluated by the local public-school nurse (see below)
- Schools will not provide meals for students during the first week after the reopening of the building
- It will be mandated that students and personnel wear face masks for the first week after the building is reopened
- Books checked out from the school library must be disinfected prior to returning to the shelf

New practices, continued

- Hand sanitizers will be made available in every room, and sanitizing wipes will be made available to students for disinfecting books, writing utensils, desks, chairs, etc.
- Weekly communication will go home from the school with any meaningful information regarding COVID-19 and the school. Included in the initial communication will be the following checklist for parents produced by the CDC to help parents to be prepared for school life during this pandemic. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/schools-checklist-parents.pdf>
- Parents will also be provided with the CDC's recommendation for cleaning their homes, found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html>
- Field trips are cancelled until government agencies advise they be reinstated
- Students will have assigned seating that will remain in place until CDC requirements change. Individual seats may be changed at the discretion of the teacher
- To keep students and personnel safe, minimal visitors will be allowed within the school. Families are encouraged to conduct all school business remotely, and if they need to visit the school they will be encouraged to wait for their child or the professional they are speaking with outside the school building. Any family members that must enter the building will be required to arrange their visit with school personnel in advance, immediately alert school personnel to their presence, wear a mask, have their temperature taken with a no-touch thermometer upon entering the building, and use hand sanitizer upon entering the building
- Students who are receiving services from professionals outside our school system (such as BLAST Services), schools will coordinate with these services to maximize the use of virtual technology to maximize the remote delivery of these services. In the event that these professionals must come to the building they will be required to arrange their visit with school personnel in advance, immediately alert school personnel to their presence, wear a mask, have their temperature taken with a no-touch thermometer upon entering the building, use hand sanitizer upon entering the building, and follow the physical distancing protocol of remaining six feet apart from other individuals
- If the school is used by another organization – a constituent church or a leasing body – then the partner organization will be made aware of this document and will be expected to comply with everything laid out in it.

What if someone at school is sick?

If someone in the school is exhibiting any sign of illness, the local public-school nurse will be notified. The school will then work in cooperation with the local public-school nurse to determine what should be done to care for the individual and to keep the school community safe. In addition to this, schools will be tracking student and personnel absenteeism to identify patterns early that may need to be investigated by either administration, Conference leadership, or the health department.

If any student is sick, even if it is not COVID-19, they should stay home and recover and will not be allowed to enter classrooms. Because COVID-19 shares symptoms with other sicknesses, families of students showing any type of symptom should contact their family medical provider. Sending sick children to school could result in the family's liability for covering professional cleaning costs of the school if their child is later diagnosed with COVID-19.

What if someone at school is diagnosed as having COVID-19?*

Information in this section is taken from the CDC guidelines which can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>. If one or more students or personnel at the school are diagnosed to with COVID-19, the following will be done:

- All families and personnel will be alerted to the diagnosis while keeping student and personnel confidentiality intact
- The local health department will be contacted, and all efforts will be coordinated with them
- School will be closed for 2-5 days for three purposes:
 - Families are encouraged to use this time to contact their family's medical provider
 - The school will undergo a deep cleaning following the CDC guidelines mentioned earlier in this document
 - In coordination with the local health department and the Pennsylvania Conference Office of Education, the school administration will determine if the 2-5 day closure is enough or if more time is needed before reopening the school building

Students will continue to receive their education through the Conference distance learning platform (see below) until the school building is reopened.

What if someone a family member of a student or staff member is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19?

Any student or staff member who has a sick family at home, regardless of a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis, will be asked to stay at home and quarantine for the recommended amount of time set forth by the CDC and the local health department. Students required to stay at home under these circumstances will continue to receive their education through the Conference distance learning platform (see below) until the school building is reopened.

If students or staff members who should stay home under these circumstances fail to abide by this policy, they may be held financially liable for cost of professionally cleaning the school.

What if school must close? How will my student(s) receive their education?

There are a few reasons that school may be closed again. As mentioned above, it is possible that one or more students or personnel could be diagnosed with COVID-19, which will result in school being closed for 2-5 days. It is also possible that the United States as a whole, or Pennsylvania in particular, may have a resurgence, leading governments to enforce stay-at-home orders again. In order to provide the best possible education for students in these or similar situations, the Pennsylvania Conference Office of Education is developing an official distance learning platform that can be used conference wide. This platform will be in place by the beginning of the school year and may be used if the criteria for reopening buildings have not yet been met.

For more information on CDC guidelines for reopening school buildings see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>.

*It is recognized that CDC requirements change as the pandemic progresses and as more information is gained regarding COVID-19. As CDC requirements change this document will be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.

Last update: 11/4/2020