

Draft Reopening Plan Overview

As we consider the reopening of school for the 2020-2021 school year, and the safe and healthy return of our students and staff, we expect significant changes influenced by continued management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Toward this end, we are working to develop a safe, clear, predictable, and positive school experience for students, staff, and families.

Although we anticipate significant differences in comparison to the reopening of schools in years past, federal, state, and county guidelines are limited and are changing rapidly. Because of this and because of what is currently known about the virus and its spread, there is little choice but to plan conservatively entertaining multiple possibilities. A key, given what isn't known and what can change rapidly, is to remain nimble and flexible so that our system can adapt to meet the needs of students, staff, and families.

At the direction of the Superintendent, the Washoe County School District formed a COVID-19 Task Force to respond to the crisis. The immediate work of the task force was to quickly prepare for and implement a distance learning model. From it, additional focused sub-committees were formed to address multiple issues confronting students, families, and staff. These included such things as food security, social and emotional health, access to technology, distance learning materials, and communication. To drive this response, key principles were articulated:

- All decisions based on a foundation of "Do No Harm"
- Ensure student, family, and staff basic needs are being met
- Ensure equitable access for all students
- Maintain high academic expectations for all students

Once it became clear that the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year would be conducted through a distance learning model, work continued to maintain and strengthen support for students, staff, and families; and attention shifted to an initial limited return of employees to District work sites, the potential for summer programming for students, and the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year.

The Superintendent directed the formation of several complementary working groups including the Reopening Task Force. The Reopening Task Force is a large body comprised of many educational stakeholders including parents, teachers, principals, site-based staff members, central office

administrators from every District office, county health officials, representation from the business community, and the faith-based community.

The first major task taken on by the Task Force was to establish Phase 1 work site reopening. Phase 1 reopening efforts were focused on employees unable to work from home and who had essential tasks that had to be completed for continuity of operations. It is estimated that Phase 1 reopening directly effects approximately 2% of the District work force. As part of Phase 1 reopening, it was determined that work sites, including all schools would remain closed to the public and that summer school activities for students would continue to use a distance learning platform.

Turning attention to the 2020-2021 reopening, the complexity of the issues that must be weighed to effectively reopen has required the formation of action-oriented subcommittees. As needed, additional focused groups will be added. Currently, five subcommittees have been established including:

- Contract Considerations
- Health and Safety
- Learning Model Pros/Cons
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Vulnerable Populations

In addition to subcommittee work, the Task Force is actively engaged in analyzing available data related to school capacity, transportation capacity, and digital access to better understand and estimate impact relative to current social distancing and precautionary health measure guidelines. It is also exploring implications associated with various programming contracts which could be pushed to limits not anticipated when initially established.

Decision Making Timeline

Led by the Superintendent, the Recovery Task Force, now called the Reopening Task Force, is expected to present initial ideas to the Board of Trustees and to seek direction at two public meetings during the month of June. It expects to return to the Board of Trustees in the month of July to finalize school reopening plans.

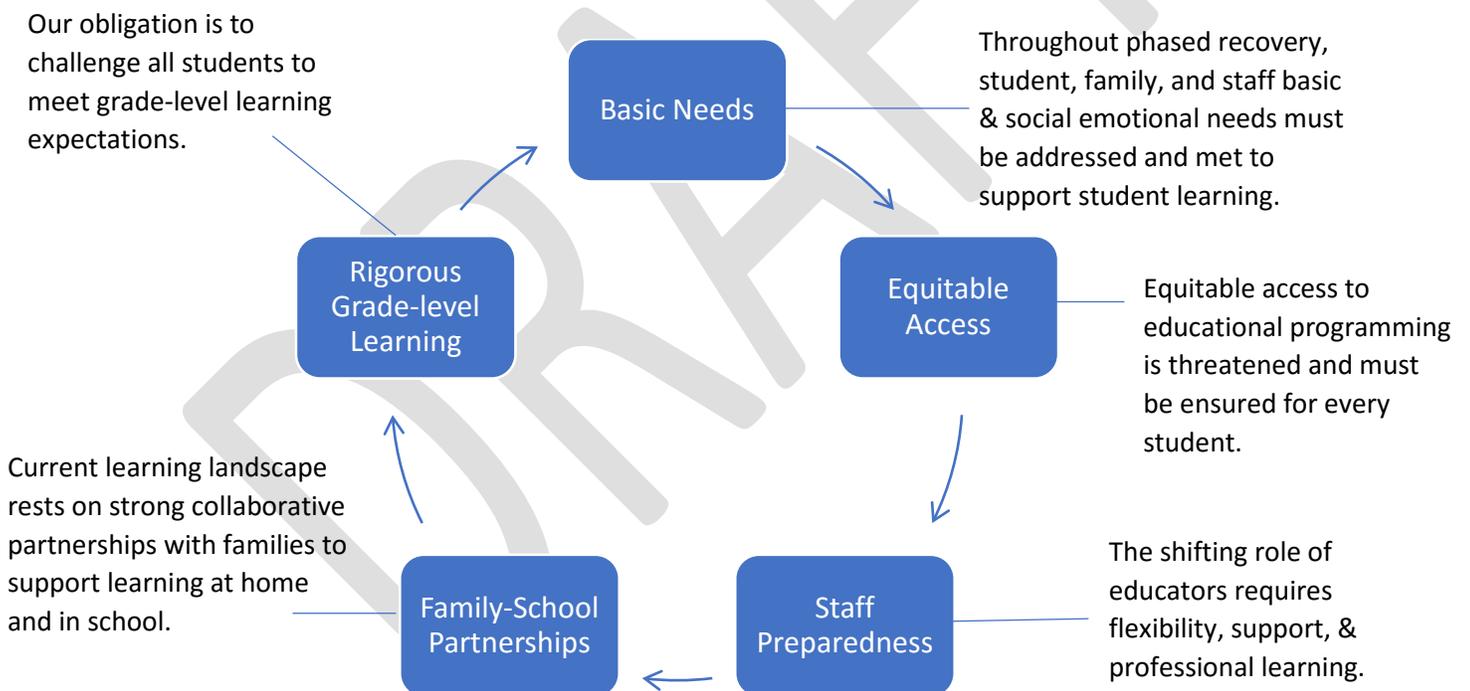
Planning Process

The planning process is fully engaged and is unfolding taking into consideration multiple factors. This includes but is not limited to:

- Guiding Principles and system priorities
- Working Assumptions
- Internal Conditions
- External Conditions
- Strategic position on threshold issues
- Structural parameters

Guiding Principles and System Priorities

None of us could have predicted the situation we collectively find ourselves in. And while there is varied opinion on how best to cope with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are in a position of linking the principles that are guiding our response efforts with overarching system priorities.



Working Assumptions

In order to efficiently plan, some general working assumptions, influenced by formal guidance and what is currently known about the virus and its spread, must be made.

- 1) As much as we would all hope for a return to school that is as similar to previous school year beginnings as possible, we do anticipate that there will be differences. Most minimally, new outbreak procedures including exclusions due to illness and/or exposure will have to be defined.
- 2) A full distance approach similar to what has transpired since April 1, 2020 is unlikely, unless we experience locally and/or nationally a resurgence of the spread of the virus that returns the state of Nevada to a shelter in place existence.
- 3) A blended model that includes aspects of both traditional “brick and mortar” school, as well as distance learning options, seems most probable. Given this, it is further assumed that:
 - a. We anticipate an expansion of our primary distance learning school, NorthStar, serving students K-12. This would likely be an alternative that families could opt for should they have a reluctance to return to a “brick and mortar” presence for whatever reason.
 - b. We anticipate an expansion of use of our Edgenuity program which also provides for on-line learning in grades 6-12. Traditionally this online strategy has primarily been used for the recovery of missed credits, and the acceleration of credit attainment. It is most often used as an addition to a “brick and mortar” presence.

Given these working assumptions, our primary focus will be on defining a blended learning approach which can best meet the safety and academic needs of all students. Attention will also be given to the other, more extreme, possibilities should they arise unexpectedly. In order to frame our learning and teaching approach, we must look at both internal conditions, and external conditions that will impinge upon our options.

Internal Conditions
1. Adaptability including ability to cope effectively with temporary closures
Health & Safety
2. Students with medical, mental wellness, and academic vulnerabilities
3. Altered cleaning protocols
4. Need for personal protective equipment
5. Social distancing measures – implications for classroom, transportation, nutrition, activities
6. Training of staff and students on various health measures
7. Outbreak process to include contact tracing and temporary exclusions of students and staff
Teaching & Learning
8. Teachers and staff with medical, and mental wellness vulnerabilities
9. Recognizing students and staff have endured a collective traumatic experience
10. Inequities in student access to educational opportunities
11. High quality on-line learning materials and on-line teaching tools
12. Professional learning and training for teachers, administrators and all staff
13. Effective monitoring tools of student learning given a blended and/or on-line approach
Human Resource & Budget
14. Redefinition of scope of responsibilities
15. Negotiated agreements with all bargaining groups
16. Various budgetary implications

External Conditions
1. Recognizing potential health and economic and other impacts families have experienced
2. Inequities associated with family access to community resources
3. Inequities with respect to internet access and device access
4. Parent availability and capacity to support distance learning
5. Availability of before school and after school programming for students
6. Competing and changing guidance from federal government, state government, and county
7. Ongoing collaborative work with county health officials once school is in session

Strategic Planning

None of us at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year predicted the crisis our community, nation, and world is enduring and how it would impact our school year. The effects on students, families, and staff have been drastic and many are still unknown. Given the unexpected interruption, our school system reacted well to the situation at hand. It quickly defined principles that would guide its efforts and in turn worked with community partners to best ensure basic needs, such as food security, were being met. It also provided a distance learning approach that attempted to provide equitable access to all students while minimizing additional stress and impact to students and families.

Part of the difficulty in the District’s reactive measures was not knowing the timeframe within which we were working. Initially distance education was planned for a two-week period. This was quickly extended to last through the month of April. And we later learned it would extend through the close of school. Throughout, every effort has been made to put students, families, and staff first.

Now with some time, still limited given the natural break in our learning calendar provided by summer, we approach planning through a strategic proactive lens. As a learning organization, we use available data and information to pave our way.

Proactive

- Given our collective experience, we have learned strategies that may propel opportunities for students learning. Student learning is not relegated to a classroom; we are capable of delivering high-quality learning opportunities online; and we can effectively grow professionally using distance strategies.

Short v. Long Term

- As we consider a blended learning approach for reopening in 2020-2021, we look for a quality approach that enhances safety of students and staff until a vaccine is available, as well as a plan that may sustain us beyond that temporary time period. To do so, we must forge strong family-school partnerships, taking advantage of both brick and mortar and virtual strategies.

Budget

- The COVID-19 crisis coupled with minimal guidance requires a conservative approach to reopening, one that best ensures health and safety. Supply chains and demand require fast-paced decision making. To the extent possible, purchases will include items that will remain useful after the formal COVID-19 recovery period. Budget feasibility is a primary learning model filter.

Basic Needs and SEL

- Given its commitment to equity and social emotional learning, the District reacted well to COVID-19 prioritizing basic needs and social emotional health. This emphasis must carry forward as we now have a better living example of the critical nature of relationships, connection, and school climate in optimizing student learning.

Accountability

- The learning and teaching cycle requires a standards-based focus, data driven planning, monitoring of learning, and adaptation of instructional practice. The unanticipated shift to a full-distance approach exposed gaps in our monitoring capabilities. Reopening requires consideration of monitoring of both brick and mortar and on-line learning.

Grade-Level Expectations

- Lacking proven systems in the initial reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, every effort must be made to strengthen student learning using a blended approach. Our obligation remains to maintain high expectations for all students, challenging students with rigorous and relevant grade level learning experiences both within the school and at a distance.

Equity

- The core belief that we have high expectations for all students and that we must ensure equitable access to all has been pushed to its limits by COVID-19. Our experience has highlighted inequities (e.g. food insecurity, digital access) and foreshadows growing disparities without intentional forward-thinking action.

Staff Support

- A longer term blended learning solution necessitates ongoing and high quality learning experiences for teachers and all staff. We must support online tool use and interactive learning approaches, equity and culturally competent practice, family engagement, social-emotional learning, in order to meet our obligations to students.

Structural Parameters Affecting Reopening

There are a variety of traditional parameters that must be considered as we think about reopening schools. These include but are not limited to:

- School calendar
- Weekly/daily student and staff schedules
- The expanding role of the educator
- Health and safety measures within schools
- Distance learning

With each structural parameter, there are many variations that have been raised as possible solutions to better cope with COVID-19. We make an initial assessment of the feasibility of such variations. Generally, three factors have been considered when judging feasibility. These include budget implications, disruption to families and staff, and learning loss.

Calendar Options	Feasibility
Extending the school year	Low
Shortening the school year	Low
Adjusting the calendar staggering start times for different students/grade levels	Medium
Adjusting use of planned breaks (fall, winter, spring) to spread current calendar	High
Weekly/Daily Student & Staff Schedules	Feasibility
Staggering start times within education level to accommodate transportation	High
Differing blended models by level/age (grade 1 v. grade 12; ES v. MS v. HS)	High
Lengthening the school day to accommodate for transitions and cleaning	Medium
Creating homogenous groups of students (n= 15-20) and rotating teachers	Medium
AM/PM schedules	Medium
Rotating 2-day/3-day – 3-day/2-day schedules	Low
Rotating week in-school/week on-distance schedules	Low
Daily blended schedules (3-4 in-school classes/2-3 distance classes)	High
Narrowing course offerings	Medium
Scope of Work	Feasibility
Teachers expected to deliver whole class instruction in-school and on-distance	Low
Teachers expected to augment whole class instruction with in-school/distance support	High
Grade level/content area teacher teams with both in-school and distance instruction	Medium
Develop cadre of “Northstar” and Edgenuity teachers	High
Expanded training/professional learning opportunities for distance learning	High
Health & Safety Measures	Feasibility
Daily screening protocols for students and staff including expanded “clinic” space	Medium
Partnership with Health Department on exclusions and contact tracing	High
Adjusted daily cleaning protocols	High
Visual cues within building emphasizing hygiene and safety measures	High
Social Distancing (building entry, limiting class sizes, bathroom use, hallways)	High
Expected and encouraged use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	High
Lunch within classrooms	Medium
Limitations to close contact activities (recess, physical education, dances)	High
Distance Learning	Feasibility

Parent choice	High
Expansion of Northstar (K-12)	High
Expansion of Edgenuity (6-12)	High
Expanded use of TEAMS curriculum platform (K-5)	High
Support for schools and families in developing strong learning partnerships	High
Training and professional development for families to support distance learning	Medium

Communication and Community Engagement

As noted above, in order to reopen schools safely and to optimally support student learning, it is critical that the voices of all educational stakeholders inform the decision-making process. Toward this end, several steps have been taken.

First and foremost, the Reopening Task Force itself has been built to include the voices of families, staff, teachers, principals, administrators, medical professionals and county health officials, community leaders, and members of our faith-based community. In an attempt to communicate progress of the District and the Reopening Task Force, a webpage has been developed. The webpage hosts task force membership, meeting agendas and notes, links to critical guiding documents, and task force reports.

In order to widen the “net” and to further engage critical constituencies, surveys have been developed and launched in an attempt to hear the opinions of students, parents, and staff. Among other things, the surveys will enable the District to estimate the desire to return to the traditional schooling and the need for distance education based on vulnerable populations.

Finally, District administration will present information and eventually seek direction from the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees’ meetings are open to the public. Reopening is anticipated to be discussed at several meetings in June and July.

Summary

It is worth reinforcing the point that none of us anticipated being in this position to re-define schooling in the wake of this pandemic. Moreover, with little still known regarding the virus and its spread, and limited and dynamic guidance coming from the federal, state, and county governments, we are doing all we can to best ensure that students and staff return to safe and healthy learning environments designed to foster belongingness and academic success. Part of our goal is to build confidence among our families and staff regarding their safety and the high quality of education students will receive. The sheer number of factors that must be considered, differences from what we experienced in school ourselves and differences that will impact families, and the decisions that must be made are going to challenge us as a community. With change, there will have to be compromise.

Every effort is being made to put the health of students and staff first. Every effort is being made to understand how all of this will affect families, with every attempt being made to minimize those impacts as practical.

In order to accomplish this, it is incumbent upon us to hear the voices of a broad base of stakeholders. It is equally important to hear from experts in the field, as well as those directly impacted by the decisions that have to be made to move forward positively.

To this end we commit ourselves to an open and dynamic process. Although mistakes may be made, careful consideration in planning will minimize these, and to allow us to adjust quickly and learn from missteps. Planning for flexibility and adaptability will be key to our ultimate success.

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