


North Dakota
K-12 SMART RESTART
Fall 2020



Dear educators, families and students,

At every level, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the delivery of education as we know it, forcing schools to become more innovative, nimble and responsive to the needs of students wherever they may be. The student-teacher relationship is a critically important element to the educational success and well-being of every child. COVID-19 forced us to adopt new practices and technologies at a rapid rate and confirmed what we all know to be true: no student learns the same way. Moving ahead, educators like never before, have an opportunity to combine the strengths of multiple delivery models, including technology, providing student voice and choice, while maintaining the foundation of education which is the student-teacher relationship.

Since March 13, 2020, educators, tribal leaders and other stakeholders engaged with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) and the North Dakota Governor's Office to respond to the closure of schools to in-person instruction due to COVID-19. On April 1, 2020, all public schools' distance learning plans were approved for implementation. While school buildings were closed to students, essential staff continued to plan, serve and support the 121,000 public and non-public school students across the state of North Dakota.

With utmost gratitude, we recognize the monumental task accomplished this past spring in transitioning students to a distance learning model. This could only be done with the dedication and support of parents, teachers, leaders, communities and state partners. Schools continued to provide essential services such as meal delivery and, with the help of private sector partners, supply technology resources to enable distance learning.

Now as we look ahead to the 2020-2021 school year, North Dakota is positioned to re-open K-12 school buildings to in-person instruction because of our citizens' commitment to following the ND Smart Restart guidance. We have not yet had to manage in-person teaching and learning for 121,000 K-12 students during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are entering new territory this fall as we serve a dual purpose to our state: the education of all students and safeguarding the health and safety of students, staff, families and communities.

Over the past several months education associations, tribal leaders, stakeholders and other partners have collaborated regarding reopening for the 2020-21 school year. A clear theme that emerged from these conversations was the need for timely guidance to aid in planning for a return to in-person instruction, delivery of services, resumption of extracurricular activities and other programs (including those provided within schools by external organizations). This guidance applies to all North Dakota public schools.

Given the dynamic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, this guidance will evolve as further research, data and resources become available. North Dakota educators and administrators continue to care for their students, demonstrate passion for their profession and show vision for the future of our state. They have adapted, innovated, and proved that despite the adversities, they continue to build a strong future for North Dakota. We remain steadfastly committed to supporting and partnering with our schools as they work to provide a safe, quality educational experience for every North Dakota student.

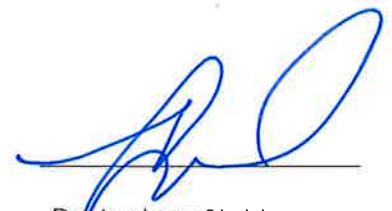
Regards,



Doug Burgum
Governor



Kirsten Baesler
State Superintendent



Dr. Andrew Stahl
Interim State Health Officer

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

North Dakota maintains these assumptions:

- Schools will provide instruction in the fall and throughout the 2020-21 school year.
- COVID-19 may continue to spread throughout the school year.
- Every student will have the opportunity to engage in a full year of learning, irrespective of the spread of COVID-19 in a community.
- Depending upon local conditions, as reported by NDDoH and [local public health units](#), instruction may be face-to-face, virtual, or a hybrid.
- Each district will work in collaboration with local health professionals (including [local public health units](#)), faculty, students, staff, and families.
- Each district will make decisions based on the most current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), current status of virus spread in and around the school community as reported by NDDoH and [local public health units](#), and in the best interests of staff, students, and families.
- School boards will play a vital role as this unprecedented event unfolds. With the situation changing daily, good policies and best practices are as important as ever and the public is looking to their school district leadership teams to provide a unified message to employees, parents, students and the general public.
- Schools will take practical steps to mitigate the spread of the virus while continuing to focus on student learning.
- Schools are congregate settings. Congregate settings are known to increase transmissible moments and therefore, more susceptible to spreading COVID-19.
- Each district required to conduct tribal consultations under the Every Student Succeeds Act will work in collaboration with the tribal leadership.
- These guiding principles are not all-inclusive and are not intended as legal advice.

North Dakota expectations for schools:

- Schools will continue to be a safe environment for students, focusing on both social-emotional and physical health. Local decisions will be rooted in what is best for students.
- School districts should prioritize state guidance and utilize national recommendations as a guide.
- School administrators will make reasoned judgments to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- School administrators will work with their school boards, faculty, staff, and community to communicate decisions and data guiding those decisions.
- Health and Safety Plans are approved by the district's school board in consultation with [local public health units](#). Those plans are published on the school's publicly accessible website.
- Schools will have a school board approved [Distance Learning Plan](#) on file. School districts can use their original Distance Learning Plan but will include new information required and improvements made. Those plans will be published on the school's publicly accessible website.
- Schools will take into consideration a hybrid approach to in-person instruction along with distance learning to best meet the health and safety plans of all students and families.
- Schools will utilize the North Dakota High School Activities Association's (NDHSAA) guidance for all decisions regarding school athletics, activities, and competitions.

Health and Safety Plans

Recognizing that each school district and individual building is unique and that all plans for the upcoming year must reflect local needs, each school district **must** create a Health and Safety Plan, which will serve as the local expectations for the phased approach to in-person instruction. The Health and Safety Plan should meet the needs of each school and **must** be created in consultation with local health professionals, faculty, staff, parents and students.

Health and Safety Plans **must** be approved by each school district's school board (in the case of Fargo, the Board of Education) in consultation with [local public health units](#). Those plans **must** also be published on the school or district's publicly available website prior to the reopening of schools and providing services to students.

Non-public, private or parochial schools are strongly encouraged to create a Health and Safety Plan tailored to their needs and publish the Health and Safety Plan on their publicly available website prior to reopening.

Each district that is required to conduct tribal consultations under the Every Student Succeeds Act **must** consult with tribal leadership.

There are 15 residential education facilities in North Dakota. To ensure the maximum safety, health, and overall well-being of students, staff, and faculty in these situations, we encourage residential facility administrators to implement the North Dakota Department of Health's [recommendations for congregate settings](#) whenever possible.



Phased Approach to In-Person Instruction Plan

RISK LEVEL

The K-12 Smart Restart has adopted the color-coded guidance in the [ND Smart Restart Plan](#). This plan categorizes reopening into five phases: red, orange, yellow, green and blue. These designations signal how restrictions on school, work, congregate settings and social interactions will ease in each county. This color-coded guidance can be applied during the levels of ND Smart Restart to protect the health, bolster confidence and provide more security. It is likely that counties across the state could be in different phases based on multiple factors used to determine health guidance. Contact [local public health unit](#) for information.



Color-coded Health Guidance System

RISK LEVEL

Each level of guidance after red becomes progressively less restrictive. Every level protects public health and outlines the necessary mitigation strategies. Each level is guided by a rigorous measurement system, based on criteria such as the number of cases reported, positivity rates, testing capacity, hospital capacity, occurrence of point-source outbreaks, level of community spread, vulnerable populations affected and ability to protect, the availability of personal protection equipment (PPE), etc. North Dakotans should think of the guidance system as a dial that can be turned up or down by area based on the health risk.

Red / Critical Risk is the level with the highest disease burden and level of significant and uncontrolled community transmission, multiple outbreaks resulting in increased deaths, surge capacity of hospitals are threatened and there is lack of adequate PPE supplies available for healthcare workers. The most significant mitigation strategies are implemented at the Red / Critical Risk level.

Orange / High Risk is the level of significant transmission and high risk for exposure due to widespread community spread of infections. There are significant mitigation strategies emphasizing “Stay Home. Stay Healthy. Stay Connected.” Only essential travel and essential workforce, adherence to strict social distancing guidance, increased cleaning and disinfecting of bathrooms and high touch surfaces.

Yellow Level/Moderate Risk is the level of heightened exposure risk and transmission is controlled in these areas. Cases are reported but contained by rapid testing and robust contact tracing. Moderate social distancing and precautions are needed. Increased cleaning on high-touch surfaces and cleanings on shared spaces should be routine. Shared surfaces will be more frequently cleaned and disinfected. Case-based interventions will actively identify and isolate people with the disease and their contacts. All vulnerable individuals should continue to self-isolate and avoid large groups in public places. Those who are sick will be asked to stay home and seek testing for COVID-19.

Green / Low Risk for exposure or transmission, low case counts are reported, public health and private healthcare are ND Smart Restart able to safely diagnose, treat, and isolate COVID-19 cases and their contacts. Some physical distancing measures and limitations on gatherings will still be recommended to prevent transmission from accelerating again. For older adults (those over age 65), those with underlying health conditions, and other populations at heightened risk from COVID-19, continuing to limit time in the community will be important. State and community leaders should prepare health alerts, communicate risk and symptoms, review plans, prepare for public health capacity if needed for spikes in cases.

Blue / New Normal is when most normal activity can resume, with standard precautions and awareness of health guidelines such as routine hand washing, stay home when sick, cover your cough, education, stockpiling, planning, routine health alerts, etc. Monitoring for illness and outbreaks will continue. Even under new normal conditions, those found to be ill will be asked to self-isolate and contacts will be asked to remain at home.



RISK LEVEL

Changing Circumstances May Impact Color Designations

Depending on the public health conditions, as reported by NDDoH, there could be additional actions, orders or guidance that is provided by NDDPI or NDDoH as a county is designated as red, orange, yellow, green or blue. *Some counties may not experience a straight path from a red to a blue designation. Instead, cycling back and forth between less restrictive to more restrictive designations may occur as reported by [local public health units](#).* This means that each district should consult with [local public health unit](#) and account for changing conditions.

Conditions for Resuming In-Person Instruction

The [CDC](#) has released two documents to assist states and school districts in planning for a gradual scale-up and eventual reopening of schools: the [Schools Decision Tree](#) and the [Interim Guidance for Schools and Day Camps](#). On June 30, 2020, the CDC published [COVID-19 testing guidance](#) for K12 schools related to SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 and [Considerations for Schools](#). These documents, along with guidelines from NDDoH and the [North Dakota Smart Restart guidance](#) provide the foundation for this guidance from North Dakota to allow local school boards in consultation with [local public health units](#) to measure and balance the risk of health and safety for students along with students overall social emotional educational experience. All documents will be updated, as needed, to reflect best practices.



K-12 Smart Restart Red Phase/Orange Phase

Schools should remain closed for general in-person instruction. All instruction **must** continue via distance learning, whether using digital or non-digital platforms.

DISTRICTS MUST:

Health & Safety Plan

- Develop a written Health and Safety Plan in preparation to move into the yellow phase. The plan **must** be approved by each district's school board in consultation with [local public health unit](#) and published on the school or district's website.

Communication

- Plan for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the elements of the local Health and Safety Plan, including ways that families can practice safe hygiene in the home.

School Meals

- Consider provisions for student services such as school meal programs are highly encouraged to continue.



K-12 Smart Restart

Yellow Phase

Schools may provide in-person instruction after developing a written Health and Safety Plan securing **approval** by each district's school board in consultation with the [local public health unit](#) and **publish** the plan on the school or district's website.

The elements for the plan in this phase are nearly identical to the green and blue phases. In this phase, school districts should be alert to the possibility of increased community spread and the need to transition to distance learning. This phase should emphasize facial coverings, personal hygiene and social distancing practices.

PLAN MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

COVID-19 Response Plan

- Identification of a "COVID-19 coordinator" and/or "COVID-19 Team" with defined roles and responsibilities for health and safety preparedness and response planning.
- Identification of an individual at each school to be notified by public health of COVID-19 cases in the school setting. This position **must** also report cases of COVID-19 identified in the school setting, if notified prior to public health. This individual will need to be available evenings and weekends to respond to phone calls from public health. This position will assist public health in identifying and notifying close contacts in the school setting. This individual will be responsible for notifying the state superintendent of cases occurring in the school setting.
- Processes for monitoring students and staff for symptoms, history of exposure and absenteeism.
- Process to identify and protect [children and staff at higher risk](#) with an opportunity for continued distance teaching and learning.
- Process to rapidly notify parents and staff of exposures in the school setting.

Positive or Close Contact

Include the NDDoH protocols for:

- Process for [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) when a staff member, student, or visitor becomes sick or demonstrates a history of exposure.
- Guidelines for when an [isolated](#) or [quarantined](#) staff member, staff, or visitor may return to school.

Communication & Training

- Train all faculty and staff on the implementation of the Health and Safety Plan.
- Train all faculty and staff on appropriate [use and wearing of facial coverings](#).
- Plan for ensuring ongoing communication with families around the elements of the local Health and Safety Plan, including ways that families can practice [safe hygiene in the home](#).

Hygiene & Cleaning

- Facial coverings (masks or face shields) should be worn by staff and students when social distancing is not possible.
- Guidelines for hygiene practices for students and staff which include the manner and frequency of hand-washing and other best practices.
- Protocols for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, and ventilating learning spaces, surfaces, and any other areas used by students (e.g., restrooms, drinking fountains, hallways, and transportation).

Physical Distancing

- Protocols for classroom/learning space occupancy that allow for separation among students and staff throughout the day to the maximum extent feasible (e.g., A/B days, A/B weeks, ½ days, cohorts of smaller groups, consistent student groups, etc.).
- Protocols for the use of cafeterias, commons areas and other congregate settings for students, faculty and staff.
- When weather permits, utilization of outdoor spaces is recommended.

Additional Safety Measures

Plan should include the following to the extent possible:

- Protocols for limiting the sharing of materials among students to the maximum amount feasible.
- Protocols for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors and volunteers.
- Protocols for adjusting space occupancy on buses that allow for separation among students to the maximum extent feasible.



K-12 Smart Restart

Green Phase/Blue Phase

Schools may provide in-person instruction after developing a written Health and Safety Plan securing **approval** by each district's school board in consultation with the [local public health unit](#) and **publish** the plan on the school or district's website.

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