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# Framework for Opening the 2020-21 School Year

**SULLIVAN COUNTY PLAN**

July 8, 2020

Dear Sullivan County Community,

The following plan is based upon the research and plan developed by the Nashville Metropolitan Health Department. Our school districts and the Sullivan County Regional Health Department support the health and safety frameworks of the Nashville plan and have adopted it based on our local considerations. We are united in our approach to planning for a safe, efficient, and equitable return to school for all school types, including public and independent schools. Public health best practices and research on COVID-19, along with evaluation of community conditions and necessary protocols, have been reviewed to consider reopening schools safely and responsibly.

This initial iteration of the Sullivan County Regional Health Department plan is just the beginning framework for planning. School leaders will apply the plans and work with their stakeholders to adjust based on their needs and inputs. Stakeholder feedback with families and employees is essential to the success of the ongoing planning.

We had two main questions to guide our work:

1. Under what community public health conditions is it safe to reopen our schools?
2. When it is safe to reopen our schools, what precautions do all schools need to take to mitigate the risk of the spread of COVID-19?

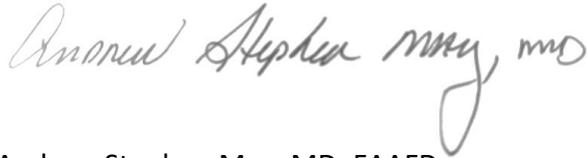
Based on the evolving expert advice of the public health community, schools in Sullivan County will only open if there is zero to moderate spread of COVID-19 based on cases per 100,000 and health department cluster evaluation. If there is severe community spread of COVID-19, then schools should prepare to operate in a remote environment.

We have agreed that county and municipal schools will take measures to mitigate for the spread of COVID-19 when they reopen, and we have detailed those in appendices. Until there is no or very minimal spread of COVID-19, we must take measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. In consultation with public health experts, we have outlined the practical actions we will take as a school community. If the data show that the conditions need to adjust, we will continue to adjust the guidance or educate in remote environments.

Please join us in reaching out to our stakeholders to explore how this plan will be implemented to address various ages of students, students from diverse backgrounds, students with varying needs, and the health needs of our teachers and all employees.

We will remain focused on the public health data and research while ensuring we provide an excellent education for our students.

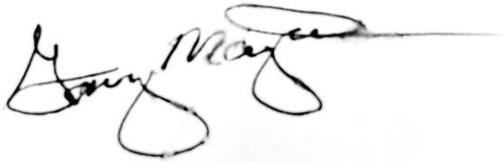
Sincerely,



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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides a roadmap for schools across Sullivan County to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. It outlines necessary steps to understand the public health scenarios associated with the pandemic and provides frameworks, approaches, and measurable milestones to inform the continuum of decisions that must be made to safely operate schools in fall 2020.

Ask any teacher, school principal, or district superintendent: Returning to school under normal circumstances is hard. Doing so in the face of COVID-19, a public health epidemic with extreme uncertainty, will be monumentally difficult. But the stakes could not be higher: An entire generation of students' academic, social-emotional, and mental health hang in the balance.

Returning to school when the public health situation allows will thus be a uniquely complicated challenge, the likes of which our educators have never encountered. If there exists any chance of returning to brick-and-mortar schooling in the fall of 2020, the work must begin now.

Given the uncertainties of the pandemic, four steps should inform this work:

1. An epidemiologic assessment and consideration of how the coronavirus pandemic may unfold over the next 18-24 months.
2. An evaluation of how each pandemic scenario may manifest in Sullivan County.
3. An application of community manifestation with school opening scenarios.
4. Essential actions that must be taken across functional workflows within each school opening scenario.

This roadmap is a framework based on the most up-to-date public health recommendations given the evidence available at the time of publication. It does not, however, constitute medical advice, and it will need to be adapted in real time as the epidemic evolves.

## Guiding Principles

Five principles should guide all planning, decision-making, and execution of the work of returning to school in the Sullivan County region's multiple school systems:

1. We will be transparent. We will share what we know and what we don't know. We will be clear about what we can control and what is outside of our control.
2. We will be equitable. We will center decisions on what is best for all students, families, and educators, especially those most impacted by educational inequities and COVID-19.
3. We will listen. We will bring together diverse stakeholders and experts to:
  - A. Understand the realities on the ground.
  - B. Develop creative solutions.
4. We will put safety first. We will leverage science, data, and public health leadership to inform the choices we make.
5. We will be decisive. Given the size and scope of the challenge, we must move deliberately and make tough choices. We will make mistakes and we will adapt quickly as variables on the ground change.

## KEY TERMS

The following terms frequently occur throughout this report. To assess, consider, and understand the COVID-19 scenarios, establishing a shared vocabulary is critical.

- **Acceptable Threshold:** A concept utilized to determine if Sullivan County is within an acceptable number of newly diagnosed COVID-19 cases to allow safe opening and operation of Sullivan County school systems. The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) defines the threshold for acceptable COVID-19 disease transmission within a community as an average of  $\leq 10$  new cases per 100,000 over the last 14 days. \*The metric/threshold may change over time as new information is gathered and additional metrics concerning school reopening guidance is established by TDH and the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE).
- **Basic Reproductive Number:** Abbreviated “Ro” and pronounced “R naught,” refers to the number of new infections resulting from a single infected person. This term is also used interchangeably with the term “viral transmissibility.”
- **Case Rate:** For this particular document; case rate is defined as a measure of the frequency with which an event occurs (COVID-19 case) in a defined population (Sullivan County) over a specified period of time (1 day).
- **Contact:** Someone with exposure to a known case closer than 6 feet for 10 minutes or greater without appropriate PPE.
- **Coronavirus:** A specific type of virus named for the appearance of crown-like spikes on their surface. There are seven known types of coronaviruses that can infect human beings. A “novel” coronavirus is a new subtype of coronavirus to which human beings have not been previously exposed and are thus more susceptible to infection. SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus.
- **COVID-19:** Abbreviation of “Coronavirus Disease-2019.” The name for the actual disease state caused by the coronavirus. COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 are often used interchangeably, though this is inaccurate. The term “COVID-19” should be used to discuss the disease, while SARS-CoV-2 should designate the virus itself.
- **Epidemic:** An outbreak of disease that spreads quickly and affects many individuals at the same time.
- **Herd immunity:** Resistance to the spread of a contagious disease within a population that results when a sufficient number of persons are immune either through prior infection and recovery or through vaccination. Herd immunity does not begin to develop until at least 60-70% of the population has been infected and recovered or vaccinated.
- **Incubation period:** The duration of time it takes for an infected person to begin to physically manifest symptoms that can be outwardly observed.

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- **Influenza virus:** Another specific type of virus from a different family than coronaviruses. There are several types of influenza virus, of which only three typically cause infection in humans on a seasonal basis.
- **Isolation:** Separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.
- **Pandemic:** A specific type of epidemic — the outbreak of widespread disease — that spreads over greater geographic distances and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population. Pandemics are relatively rare events, and not every epidemic qualifies as a pandemic. The World Health Organization declared the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak a pandemic in March 2020.
- **Quarantine:** Separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.
- **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2:** Abbreviated as SARS-CoV-2, the scientific name of the coronavirus causing the pandemic.

# UNDERSTANDING PANDEMIC MODELING:

## Coronavirus and Influenza

Epidemiologists typically rely on prior disease outbreaks for guidance when modeling new virus behavior. For example, annual influenza modeling relies on historical influenza virus behavior. But the COVID-19 pandemic has proven somewhat atypical from a modeling perspective for several reasons.

First, coronaviruses as a family have not been known to cause pandemics like this one. Recent coronavirus outbreaks, including severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), did not have the geographic reach of SARS-CoV-2. Instead, they manifested in more limited geographic areas. Second, each was less infectious than SARS-CoV-2, and transmission from person-to-person was lower than that of SARS-CoV-2. Finally, both SARS and MERS were each much more lethal than SARS-CoV-2 (approximately 14% and 35% of the individuals who contracted the respective viruses died).<sup>1</sup> These mitigating factors made the termination of transmission chains easier to achieve.

Broadly speaking, although they are from different families of viruses, SARS-CoV-2 is displaying behavior more similar to a novel influenza than to a coronavirus because of its higher transmissibility, wider geographic spread, and lower comparative mortality relative to other lethal coronaviruses.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, influenza outbreaks offer better historical and comparative models for assessing this outbreak.

Since 1700, there have been at least eight global influenza pandemics that can inform COVID-19 scenario planning.

1. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/en/>

2. [https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/downloads/cidrap-covid19-viewpoint-part1\\_0.pdf](https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/downloads/cidrap-covid19-viewpoint-part1_0.pdf)

## Coronavirus and Influenza Similarities and Differences

Similarities	Differences
<p>Both novel influenza and SARS-CoV-2 are highly contagious and capable of infecting large groups of people because nearly everyone in the global population is susceptible to the virus, and there is an absence of immunity.</p>	<p>SARS-CoV-2 has a longer incubation period than influenza (between 2-14 days <sup>3</sup>), and the percentage of persons with asymptomatic infections is greater with COVID-19 (up to 25%, compared to approximately 16% in influenza <sup>4,5</sup>). Furthermore, studies show that rates and quantities of viral shedding with SARS-CoV-2 may actually peak before symptoms manifest themselves, which allows infected individuals to spread the disease with greater efficiency than those infected with influenza. <sup>6,7</sup></p>
<p>Both are also spread by respiratory droplets and share the ability to spread between people without showing symptoms during the incubation period.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Higher Basic Reproductive Rate (Ro) for SARS-CoV-2. For comparison, the Ro with prior pandemic influenza outbreaks has been around 2, meaning that each person infected passes it to two other persons.<sup>1</sup> For SARS-CoV-2, the Ro has fluctuated between 1 during periods of extreme social distancing up to 5.7 or higher without mitigation measures in place.</p>

3. <https://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2762808/incubation-period-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-from-publicly-reported>
4. <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-asymptomatic-spread.html>
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4586318/>
6. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0869-5>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4725380/>

## Seasonality and Duration

From a seasonal perspective, and again comparing SARS-CoV-2 to pandemic influenza, it is worth noting that, “of eight major [influenza] pandemics that have occurred since the early 1700s, no clear seasonal pattern has emerged for most. Two started in the winter in the Northern Hemisphere, three in the spring, one in the summer, and two in the fall.”

Of those eight pandemics, seven had a smaller early peak that dissipated over a few months, followed by a subsequent peak approximately six months later. Among those subsequent peaks, some were smaller, and some were significantly larger and quite devastating. In some, the mortality rates increased with time such that the disease became more dangerous during the second waves. Finally, some of the pandemics included third and even fourth waves, though these have all been smaller and shorter duration than first- and second-wave events.

Eventually, these pandemics subsided when enough of the population had been infected, developed immunity, and were no longer susceptible; or, the viruses themselves mutated and were either no longer

infectious or their mortality decreased. The critical point, however, is that second, third, and fourth waves have a confirmed historical precedent and are not an aberration. It is highly likely that this virus will return with a peak that is difficult to predict.

## Vaccination

Interestingly, of the eight pandemic events referenced above, only one was significantly affected by a vaccination campaign (the 2009 H1N1 influenza). In that instance, a vaccine became available approximately six months after the pandemic initially began in Veracruz, Mexico, and a full-scale, global pandemic was averted. The other seven pandemics all propagated at a global scale before a vaccine could be effectively produced.

For SARS-CoV-2, there are approximately 120 vaccine candidates in development. Some have advanced farther than others, but all remain in relatively early clinical trials. Some experts have estimated that if new techniques currently being experimented with succeed, a vaccine could be available in late 2020. Most, however, agree that a 12-to-18-month timeline to mid-2021 is most likely.

## Effects of Pediatric Population on Disease Spread

Historically, pandemic influenza outbreaks have most severely affected populations at the extremes of age, with the youngest and oldest members of society typically experiencing the highest mortality rates. The 1918-1919 influenza was an outlier in that regard and affected middle-aged persons in higher percentages than typically observed.

With SARS-CoV-2, there still remains much to learn about how pediatric, school-age populations are affected. Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>8</sup>, suggest that serious COVID-19 illness in children is rare. However, there are increasing reports of a pediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome that may be linked to SARS-CoV-2<sup>9</sup>. Whether children can spread the disease to others without showing symptoms remains unclear.

Ultimately, it remains unclear to this point at what rate children develop serious illness secondary to SARS-CoV-2 infection and whether or not they can pass the virus to other children and adults. Most studies suggest each of these rates is extremely low, but the data are imperfect, and this is an area of active research.

## Implications

Based on the transmissibility, seasonality, duration, and vaccination timing, expert models conclude that it is most likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will last 18-24 months. During that period, and assuming the high levels of transmissibility already observed, it is estimated that 60-70% of the population would need to be infected, recover, and develop immunity “to reach a critical threshold of herd immunity to halt the pandemic.” Current estimates are that even in highly affected areas such as Wuhan, China, and New York City, the total percentage of the population infected is between 3-10%. There is clearly significant potential for this virus to continue propagating.

There are, however, several factors that would affect those estimates. First, a successful vaccine could be developed in the near term, though, as noted above, that is unlikely based on historical precedent. Second, a successful treatment could be developed such that the “cost” of getting infected decreases, and overall mortality rates improve. Third, the virus mutates such that it is no longer as infectious or as dangerous. Historical rates of coronavirus mutation are much lower than influenza, however, and this outcome appears relatively unlikely in the near term. Or fourth, we institute and continue mitigation measures to help decrease the basic reproductive number and drive down transmission (e.g., social distancing).

## Mitigation

The most effective method to decrease transmission rates in the absence of a vaccine or treatment is to prevent contact between persons for a period of time that includes a full incubation and recovery cycle (refer to current CDC guidance for duration). When this happens, transmission chains between persons can be broken, and the case rates for the virus within a specific population can go down.

Such has been the national strategy for SARS-CoV-2 for the past several months. By effectively closing all sites of congregation, including schools, worksites, restaurants, places of worship, and social gatherings, an effort was made to decrease case spreading of the disease. Difficulties with coronavirus testing at scale, however, have made it difficult to accurately measure this figure on a national scale, and government leaders and emergency response officials have had to rely on imperfect data, including the number of persons hospitalized and intensive care unit utilization, as a proxy for this number.

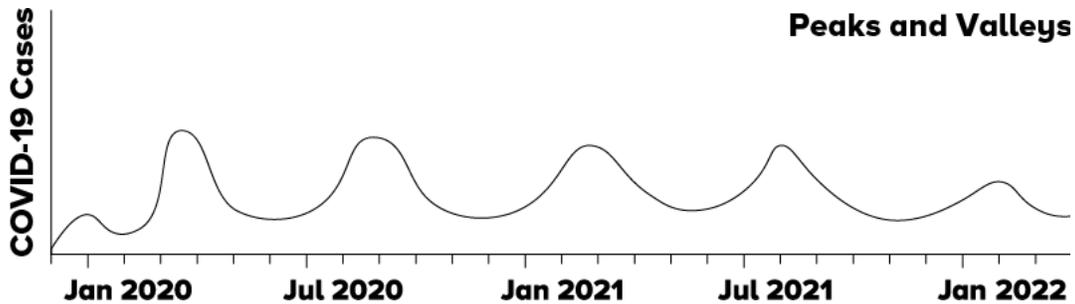
8. <https://emilyoster.substack.com/p/various-updates-and-assessing-risk>

9. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/nyregion/kawasaki-disease-coronavirus.html>

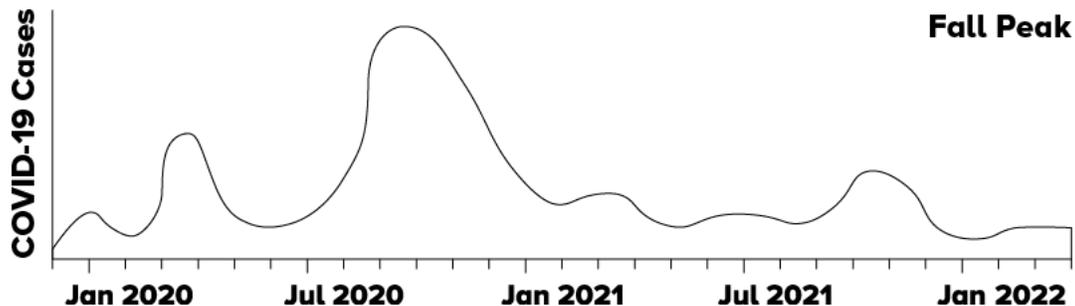
# CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC SCENARIOS

Based on the evidence detailed above, three possible pandemic scenarios could play out over the next 18-24 months, and each should be considered.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the scenarios depicted below are not based on predictive data.

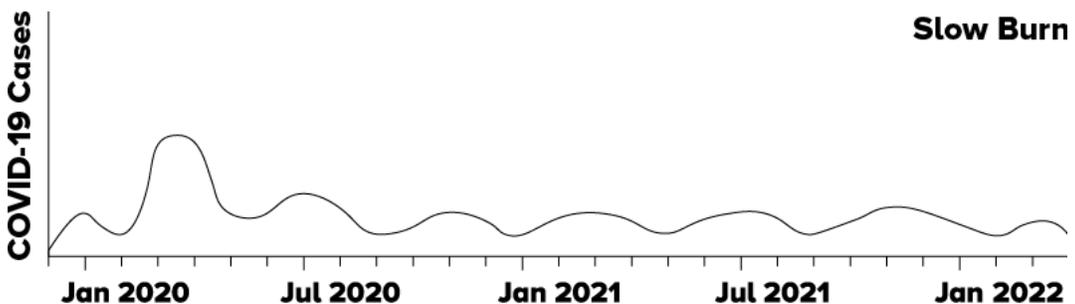
- **Peaks and Valleys:** The first wave of COVID-19 occurring in spring 2020 is a representative wave with several follow-on outbreaks of similar scale and duration.



- **Fall Peak:** The first spring 2020 wave of COVID-19 is a smaller wave with the second, more severe wave in fall 2020 following afterward.



- **Slow Burn:** The first wave in spring 2020 is the most severe wave, but the outbreak continues on a slow burn in the population at a low or moderate level.



Each of these scenarios includes waves that will vary by geographic location and require periodic mitigation measures when subsequent peaks develop. The duration of the peaks, or how long a local outbreak lasts, will

depend on the number of persons affected and how quickly the case rate can be reduced in the population. Reducing the case rate can only be achieved through early case identification, isolation of affected individuals, and quarantine of appropriate contacts to prevent further spread.

## Community Spread and School Operating Scenarios

Within each of the pandemic scenarios above, the virus will manifest in local communities in one of three ways at any given point in time and will be evaluated by applying the acceptable threshold criteria\*:

- **None to minimal:** Defined as very few, if any, COVID-19 cases among Sullivan County residents, with an average case rate of 0-5 new cases per 100,000 residents over the last 14 days.
- **Minimal to moderate:** Defined as an average case rate of 6-10 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Sullivan County residents over the last 14 days.
- **Substantial:** Defined as an average case rate of >11 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Sullivan County residents over the last 14 days.

\*The metric/threshold criteria may change over time as new information is gathered and additional metrics concerning school reopening guidance is established by TDH and the TDOE.

The level of community spread and accounting for appropriate case cluster evaluation and investigation are core public health inputs that should inform school leaders' decision-making relative to school reopening.

To determine the level of community spread, school leaders should plan to have appropriately frequent discussions with local public health officials and city and county leaders to determine whether the case rate warrants further actions. School, city, and county leaders must plan to clearly communicate the level of community spread as well as the factors used to make that determination on a weekly basis.

To be clear, local health departments, school officials, and city and county leaders cannot focus only on the number of cases and the case rate alone, but should also consider characteristics across four factors to fully determine community risk. These factors include:

- **Disease epidemiology:** Level of community transmission, number and type of outbreaks, impact of the outbreaks on delivery of healthcare or other critical infrastructure or services, and epidemiology in surrounding jurisdictions.
- **Community characteristics:** Size of community and population density, level of community engagement/support, size and characteristics of vulnerable populations, access to healthcare, transportation, planned large events, and relationship of community to other communities.
- **Local healthcare capacity:** Healthcare workforce, number of healthcare facilities, testing capacity, hospital intensive care unit capacity, and availability of personal protective equipment.
- **Public health capacity:** Public health workforce and availability of resources to implement strategies, and available support from other state/local government agencies and partner organizations.

# SCHOOL OPENING SCENARIOS

Given the Coronavirus pandemic scenarios and the manifestation of community spread, there are multiple possibilities for school opening in fall 2020, and decisions should be based on the public health framework for reopening:

## Public Health Framework for Reopening

	No to Minimal Spread	Minimal to Moderate Spread	Substantial Spread
Threshold Level	Average case rate of $\leq 5$ new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Sullivan County residents over the last 14 days	Average case rate of 6-10 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Sullivan County residents over the last 14 days	Average case rate of $\geq 11$ new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Sullivan County residents over the last 14 days
School Opening Recommendation	Schools Open	Situation Dependent	Consideration for Transition to Remote Learning

From an epidemiological standpoint, schools will be able to open and remain open if transmission remains low. If the Sullivan County region experiences community disease transmission higher than the acceptable threshold level then schools will likely be required to close to help break transmission chains. It is important to note that identification and investigation of potential COVID-19 case clusters are an imperative component in this decision making process and requires thorough discussions between public health officials and the local school systems.

The most recent data can be found by county on the Tennessee Department of Health website at [www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/data/epi-curves.html](http://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/data/epi-curves.html).

## **PROTOCOL GUIDANCE**

The following guidance outlines general considerations for use by all school systems in Sullivan County as they develop district-specific operational procedures for opening the 2020-21 school year. These protocols are not intended to be all-inclusive. Each individual district will have unique situations, environments, and capabilities that will require the development of district-specific guidelines that outline functional procedures as school resumes for the 2020-21 academic year.

## Class Size/Spacing Requirements

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Changes to class sizes and spacing unnecessary; can resume normal seating.
- Students and staff are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Arrange all desks facing the same direction toward the front of the classroom with as much space between them as possible.
- Students are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear masks, use a physical barrier to the side of desks, or distance students six feet apart.
- Staff should try to maintain six feet of spacing between themselves and students as much as possible, but are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear masks if closer than six feet.
- Classroom windows should be open when possible and conditions allow.
- Assemblies of less than 50 students at a time are discouraged, but allowed as long as facemasks are utilized.
- Large-scale assemblies of more than 50 students should be discontinued.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration for transition to remote learning.

## Protocols for Movement Operations

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- No changes in movement between classes are required.
- Students are allowed to enter/exit buildings using normal screening procedures.
- Students and staff are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Flow of foot traffic should be directed in only one direction if possible.
  - If one-way flow is not possible, hallways can be divided with either side following the same direction.
- Efforts should be made to try and keep six feet of distance between persons in the hallways.
- Appropriate wearing of face masks is strongly encouraged at all times in hallways.
- Staggered movements at incremental intervals should be used if feasible to minimize the number of persons in the hallways as able.
- Floor tape or other markers should be used at six foot intervals where line formation is anticipated.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration for transition to remote learning.

## Protocols for Screening Students

At this time, the CDC recommends temperature screening of students upon entry only if feasible for the situation. Larger schools will not be able to provide this screening for every student, though smaller schools may be able to do so. If any screening does occur, it should comply with privacy and HIPAA requirements. A feasible protocol would include:

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Students are allowed to enter the building at limited sites and are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.
- Students are allowed to enter/exit the building using normal screening procedures.
- Parents should check child's temperature at home every morning using oral, tympanic, or temporal scanners; children with a temperature 100.0 or above should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if no other explanation is available.
- Parents should ask their child or monitor for any cough, congestion, shortness of breath, or gastrointestinal symptoms every morning. Any positives should prompt the parent to keep the child home from school.
- Students who fall ill at school will be placed in a designated area of isolation with a surgical mask in place. Nurses will wear masks when caring for these students.
- Students sent home from school should be kept home until they have tested negative or have completely recovered according to [CDC guidelines](#).

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Students are allowed to enter the building at limited sites and must egress from other exits to keep traffic moving in a single direction.
- Parents should check child's temperature at home every morning using oral, tympanic, or temporal scanners; children with a temperature of 100.0 or above should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if no other explanation is available.
- Parents should ask their child or monitor for any cough, congestion, shortness of breath, or gastrointestinal symptoms every morning. Any positives should prompt the parent to keep the child home from school.
- If resources allow, schools can perform temperature checks on students once per day; students with a fever of 100.0 or above should be sent to a designated area of isolation for transport home.
- Students who fall ill at school should be placed in a designated area of isolation with a surgical mask in place. Nurses should wear surgical masks when caring for these students except an N95 when performing aerosolizing procedures.
- Students sent home from school should be kept home until they have completely recovered as defined by CDC guidelines.
- When students return to school; they should check in with the school administration to ensure proper communication with health officials.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration for transition to remote learning.

## Protocols for School Visitors

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Parents/Visitors are allowed to enter the building and are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.
- Parents/Visitors will be allowed to enter the building pending passing of health-screening procedures.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Parents/Visitors are not allowed in the school building except under extenuating circumstances; adults entering the building should wash or sanitize hands prior to entering, should practice social distancing, and are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks.
- If there are extenuating circumstances that necessitate a parent entering the school, only one parent per child should be allowed to enter to minimize the number of entering persons.
- Strict records, including day and time, should be kept of non-school employees entering and exiting the building.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Parents/Visitors are not allowed in the school building except under extenuating circumstances; adults entering the building should wash or sanitize hands prior to entering, should practice social distancing, and are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks.
- If there are extenuating circumstances that necessitate a parent entering the school, only one parent per child should be allowed to enter to minimize the number of entering persons.
- Strict records, including day and time, should be kept of non-school employees entering and exiting the building.

## Testing Protocols for Students

The CDC has specifically stated that schools are not expected to be testing students or staff for SARS-CoV-2. At this time, there are new antigen tests seeking approval by the Food and Drug Administration that would make point-of-care testing a possibility, but this is not expected to extend to schools or be performed by school nurses.

With that consideration, a feasible protocol would include:

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Students who develop fever greater than 100.0 or become ill at school should be kept in a designated area of Isolation with a surgical mask in place until they can be transported off campus. They should be transported by their parents, or ambulance if clinically unstable, for off-site testing and medical evaluation. In the event that any student tests positive, immediate efforts should be made to inform any close contacts (those who spent more than 10 minutes within 6 feet of the student) so they can be quarantined at home. Classmates should be closely monitored for any symptoms. At this time, empiric testing of all students in the class is not recommended; only those who develop symptoms require testing.
- In the event that a student or adult tests positive, the Sullivan County Regional Health Department (or the county public health department of the individual's residence) will initiate the case interview and investigation and proceed with contact tracing. Immediate notification to the school system in which the student or adult is affiliated will be made by the health department. The health department will follow-up with close contacts (those who spent more than 10 minutes within 6 feet of the individual) so that they may be quarantined at home. Classmates should be closely monitored for any symptoms. At this time, empiric testing of all students in the class is not recommended; only those who develop symptoms require testing.
- In the event that a student or adult tests positive, the school will coordinate with the Sullivan County Regional Health Department to identify potentially impacted students and families for notification to encourage closer observation for any symptoms at home.
- Parents should check their child's temperature at home every morning using oral, tympanic, or temporal scanners; students with a temperature of 100.0 above should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if no other explanation is available.
- Parents should ask their child or monitor for any cough, congestion, shortness of breath, or gastrointestinal symptoms every morning. Any positives should prompt the parent to keep the child home from school and seek out testing and medical evaluation.
- Students sent home from school should be kept home until they have tested negative or have completely recovered according to TDH *Guidelines for Releasing Cases and Contacts from Isolation and Quarantine*. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/cedep/novel-coronavirus/Isolation-QuarantineRelease.pdf>

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Students who develop fever greater than 100.0 or become ill at school should be kept in a designated area of isolation with a surgical mask in place until they can be transported off campus. They should be transported by their parents, or ambulance if clinically unstable, for off-site testing

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and medical evaluation. In the event that any student tests positive, immediate efforts should be made to inform any close contacts (those who spent more than 10 minutes within 6 feet to the student) so they can be quarantined at home. Classmates should be closely monitored for any symptoms. At this time, empiric testing of all students in the class is not recommended; only those who develop symptoms require testing.

- In the event that a student or adult tests positive, the Sullivan County Regional Health Department (or the county public health department of the individual's residence) will initiate the case interview and investigation and proceed with contact tracing. Immediate notification to the school system in which the student or adult is affiliated will be made by the health department. The health department will follow-up with close contacts (those who spent more than 10 minutes within 6 feet to the individual) so that they may be quarantined at home. Classmates should be closely monitored for any symptoms. At this time, empiric testing of all students in the class is not recommended; only those who develop symptoms require testing.
- In the event that a student or adult tests positive, the school will coordinate with the Sullivan County Regional Health Department to identify potentially impacted students and families for notification to encourage closer observation for any symptoms at home.
- Parents should check their child's temperature at home every morning using oral, tympanic, or temporal scanners; students with a temperature of 100.0 above should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if no other explanation is available.
- Parents should ask their child or monitor for any cough, congestion, shortness of breath, or gastrointestinal symptoms every morning. Any positives should prompt the parent to keep the student home from school and seek out testing and medical evaluation
- Students sent home from school should be kept home until they have tested negative or have completely recovered according TDH *Guidelines for Releasing Cases and Contacts from Isolation and Quarantine*. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/cedep/novel-coronavirus/Isolation-QuarantineRelease.pdf>

### **Substantial Community Spread**

- Consideration for transition to remote learning.

## **Protocols for Responding to Positive Tests Among Staff and Students**

- In the event of a positive test among staff or a student, the classroom or areas exposed should be immediately closed until cleaning and disinfection can be performed.
- If the person was in the school building without a face mask, or large areas of the school were exposed to the person, short-term dismissals (2-5 days) may be required to clean and disinfect the larger areas. This decision should be made in concert with the local public health department.
- If possible, smaller areas should be closed for 24 hours before cleaning to minimize the risk of any airborne particles.
- Cleaning staff should wear appropriate PPE as referenced in the CDC guidance for disinfection and cleaning. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>

## Protocols for Dining

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Students and staff will wash or use hand sanitizer before and after every meal.
- Meal activities continue per normal operating procedures.
- Students and staff are strongly encouraged to utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.
- Serving and cafeteria staff should use barrier protection, including gloves and face masks; N95 respirators are not required.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Students and staff will wash or use hand sanitizer before and after every meal.
- If possible, classrooms should be used for eating in place.
- School-supplied meals may be delivered to classrooms with disposable utensils.
- If cafeterias need to be used, mealtimes must be staggered to create seating arrangements with six feet of distance between students.
- Disposable utensils should be employed and presented per child (instead of children reaching and selecting them themselves).
- Serving and cafeteria staff should use barrier protection, including gloves and face masks; N95 respirators are not required.
- Open selection of food (salad bars, self-serve stations) should be closed or manned by an adult to avoid multiple surface touches.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Schools enact off-site food programs.

## Protocols for Gatherings and Extracurricular Activities

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Students and staff are to wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after every event.
- Large-scale gatherings are allowed per Tennessee Pledge guidelines.
- Extracurricular activities and gatherings conducted per Tennessee Pledge guidelines.
- Before and after-school programs are open and operating normally.
- Students and staff are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Assemblies of less than 50 students at a time are discouraged, but allowed as long as face masks remain in use with physical distancing.
  - Parents and grandparents are not allowed to attend these assemblies; schools will offer telecasting of events if able.
- Students and staff are to wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after every event.
- Large-scale assemblies of more than 50 students should be discontinued.
- Off-site field trips are discontinued.
- Inter-school activities may continue as long as bus transportation is provided and students wear face masks throughout the transport period.
- Schools may elect to discontinue these activities if case rates and community transmission rise consistently.
- After-school programs may continue with the use of face masks and distancing.
- Schools may elect to discontinue these activities if community case rates and community transmission rise consistently.

### Substantial Community Spread

- No on-site activities are allowed.
- All inter-school activities are discontinued.
- After-school activities are discontinued.

## Protocols for Athletic Events

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- Activities are allowed per TSSAA, Tennessee Pledge, FIRST CORE Region superintendents, and Northeast Tennessee School Systems Athletics Activity Return to Action Plan guidance.
- Spectator events are allowed per Tennessee Pledge guidance.
- Spectators are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Only sports that can be modified to allow physical distancing for conditioning are allowed to continue, preferably outside. Off-site, inter-school competitions may be held provided that face masks are worn during transportation.
- Spectators fewer than 50 are allowed. Wearing of face masks by observers is strongly recommended at all times with appropriate social distancing.
- Large-scale spectator events with more than 50 people are not allowed.
- Schools may elect to discontinue these activities if case rates and community transmission rise consistently.
- Schools should consult with public health officials and school sports governing bodies for the current public health guidance on sports with close contact.
- Students and staff wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after every practice, event, or other gathering.
- Weight room and physical conditioning activities should only be used with proper social distancing in alignment with TN Pledge Guidelines
- Locker rooms and group changing areas should be closed unless social distancing may be observed.
- Any uniforms or other clothing that need to be washed/laundered at school can be washed in warm water with regular detergent.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration of suspension of athletic events.

## Protocols for Personal Protective Equipment and Hand Washing

Use of physical distancing measures is designed to create layers of redundancy, recognizing that students are unlikely to be able to maintain full compliance at all times. They are designed to minimize the risk of transmission as much as possible while still allowing for feasibility, flexibility, and ease of use.

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- No personal protective equipment is required, though students and staff are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.
- Regular use of hand sanitizer and hand washing per normal operating status.
- Students should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before and after using playground equipment and athletic equipment.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- All staff and students are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks when they are in common areas, including moving between classrooms; masks may be homemade or disposable level one (basic) grade surgical masks; N95 respirators are not necessary, except for nurses performing aerosolizing procedures.
- Students should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after changing any classroom. Staff in the classroom should wash their hands or use sanitizer every time a new group of students enters their room.
- Students and staff should have scheduled hand washing with soap and water or use of hand sanitizer every 2-3 hours.
- Students should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before and after using playground equipment and athletic equipment.
- Privacy or barrier screens may be placed at the side of desks in classrooms.
- Gloves are not required except for janitorial staff or other staff cleaning classrooms.
- Gowns, hair coverings, and shoe covers are not required.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration for transition to remote learning.

## Protocols for Cleaning

Coronaviruses on hard surfaces can survive for hours to days. Exposure to sunlight and higher temperatures is expected to diminish their survival, but the exact amount of time required remains unclear. At this point, more aggressive cleaning practices are recommended in order to err on the side of caution.

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- School campuses should undergo cleaning on an increased tempo.
- Frequently touched surfaces, including lights, doors, benches, bathrooms, etc., should undergo cleaning with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution (1/3 cup bleach per one gallon of water) frequently, no less than daily.
- Libraries, computer labs, arts, and other hands-on classrooms should undergo cleaning with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution frequently, no less than daily.
- Efforts should be made to minimize sharing of materials between students as able.
- Student desks should be wiped down with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution frequently, no less than daily.
- Athletic equipment should be cleaned with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution frequently, no less than daily.
- Staff should wear gloves and face masks when performing all cleaning activities.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- Routine cleaning with standard soap and water removes germs and dirt and lowers the risk of spreading SARS-CoV-2.
- School campuses should undergo normal cleaning on a daily basis.
- Frequently touched surfaces, including lights, doors, benches, bathrooms, etc., should undergo cleaning with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution (1/8 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water) at least twice daily.
- Libraries, computer labs, arts, and other hands-on classrooms should undergo standard cleaning procedures with increased frequency or between groups.
- Student desks should be wiped down with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution at the beginning and end of every day.
- Athletic equipment can be cleaned with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or dilute bleach solution twice daily.
- Staff should wear gloves and face masks when performing all cleaning activities.

### Substantial Community Spread

- Consideration of schools closure and cleaning practices adjusted to maintain school buildings in clean and well-functioning order. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

## **Protocols for Busing and Student Transportation**

The risks associated with student transportation in buses have not been studied to date. As a result, these recommendations are derived from school operating procedures and the best “reasonable standard” given feasibility constraints.

### **No to Minimal Community Spread**

- School busing operations proceed normally.
- No changes to schedules or seating patterns on the buses are required, though students are strongly encouraged to appropriately wear face masks and utilize social distancing measures (minimum 6 feet) whenever possible.

### **Minimal to Moderate Community Spread**

- The wearing of face masks by all staff and students at all times is strongly encouraged.
- Windows should be open when possible and conditions allow.
- Unloading of buses at school should be staggered to minimize mixing of students as they enter school and to allow six feet of distance while entering through designated entry points.
- Seats and handrails should be wiped down with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or diluted bleach solution before and after every ride.
- Limited seating and spacing.

### **Substantial Community Spread**

- Consideration of transition to remote learning with the potential for all busing operations to be suspended.

## Protocols for Serving Medically Vulnerable Students and Staff

Understandably, a key concern is whether certain populations of students, teachers, and other school-based employees may be at increased risk of infection and severe disease by attending school in-person. According to the Centers for Disease Control, some people are more likely than others to become severely ill should they contract COVID-19:

- Risk for severe illness increases with [age](#); and/or
- People of all ages with [certain underlying medical conditions](#), particularly if not well controlled.

Unfortunately, there is no validated data on how much risk these individuals incur by attending school in-person, and individuals will need to make the decision to attend in close consultation with their health care provider. A reasonable protocol may include the following, however:

### No to Minimal Community Spread

- All students and staff are able to attend school and activities normally. Please refer to district-specific protocols implemented under this level of operations.
- If they choose to do so, students (or the student's legal guardian) may self-identify as having a high-risk medical condition to school staff.
- If they choose to do so, staff may self-identify as having a high-risk medical condition to Human Resources.

### Minimal to Moderate Community Spread

- If they choose to do so, students (or the student's legal guardian) may self-identify as having a high-risk medical condition to school staff.
- If they choose to do so, staff may self-identify as having a high-risk medical condition to their district's Human Resources Department.
- Parents may elect to keep children with underlying health conditions at home and pursue education through remote learning.
- Ultimately, individual decisions to attend school in person will be left to parents, students, and staff.

### Substantial Community Spread

- All teaching should be moved to video conferencing platforms.
- Schools should enact abbreviated teaching schedules that allow core subject matter to be transmitted on a regular basis. Elective material may be discontinued at school discretion.

## CONCLUSION

This report establishes a framework to plan and implement a safe, efficient, and equitable return to school. While informed by evidence and global best practices, it is limited by the boundaries of scientific knowledge about the COVID-19. There remains epidemiological uncertainty, a lack of established precedent, and insufficient data to make recommendations that entirely remove risk from returning to school. It is likely that, despite implementation of all of the recommendations in this report and the safety protocol appendices that follow, educators and students may still be infected and develop COVID-19. The risk cannot be driven to absolute zero.

In those instances, there is clearly a risk calculus that will have to be considered by the Sullivan County Government and education leaders. These risks will need to be communicated to the public so that an informed decision can be made on whether the benefits of returning to school outweigh the risks.

The recommendations provided within are in line with best practices being used throughout the State of Tennessee, informed by guidance from organizations such as the Tennessee Department of Health, Vanderbilt University, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our hope is that this report provides those leaders with the information needed to make the difficult decisions ahead in the safest and most informed manner possible.