

June 11, 2020

Welcome, Premium Subscriber  
MY ACCOUNT | LOGOUT

NEW! FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY  
Digital Edition of Education Week

Browse archived issues **Current Issue**

TOPICS ▼ BLOGS REPORTS & DATA ▼ EVENTS ▼ OPINION VIDEO GALLERY JOBS

Published: June 10, 2020

# The Socially Distanced School Day



—Stephanie Shafer for Education Week

By **Madeline Will**

Classrooms. Hallways. Buses. Schedules. Extracurriculars. Every facet of the school day will have to be fundamentally altered when students eventually return to school.

To prevent the spread of the coronavirus, school leaders must ensure social distancing—limiting group sizes, keeping students six feet apart, restricting non-essential visitors, and closing communal spaces. Those measures run counter to how schools usually operate, with teachers and students working together in close quarters, children socializing throughout the day, and the buildings serving as a community gathering space.

Anyone who's been to a school knows it will be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee "absolute compliance with any social distancing measure," said Mario Ramirez, the managing director of Opportunity Labs who was the acting director for pandemic and emerging threats in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during the Ebola epidemic.

## About this Project

### HOW WE GO BACK TO SCHOOL



First in a series of eight installments.

These times are unprecedented. Through these eight installments, we will explore

The goal, he said, is to “drive as much of the risk down as you can.”

the steps administrators need to take to ensure the safety of students and faculty.

To help district and school leaders navigate decisions and planning, Education Week spoke to numerous experts, from public health officials to superintendents, about ways that schools can adjust their operations to allow for a safe return to in-person schooling as the pandemic continues.

> **Up next: Scheduling and Staffing**

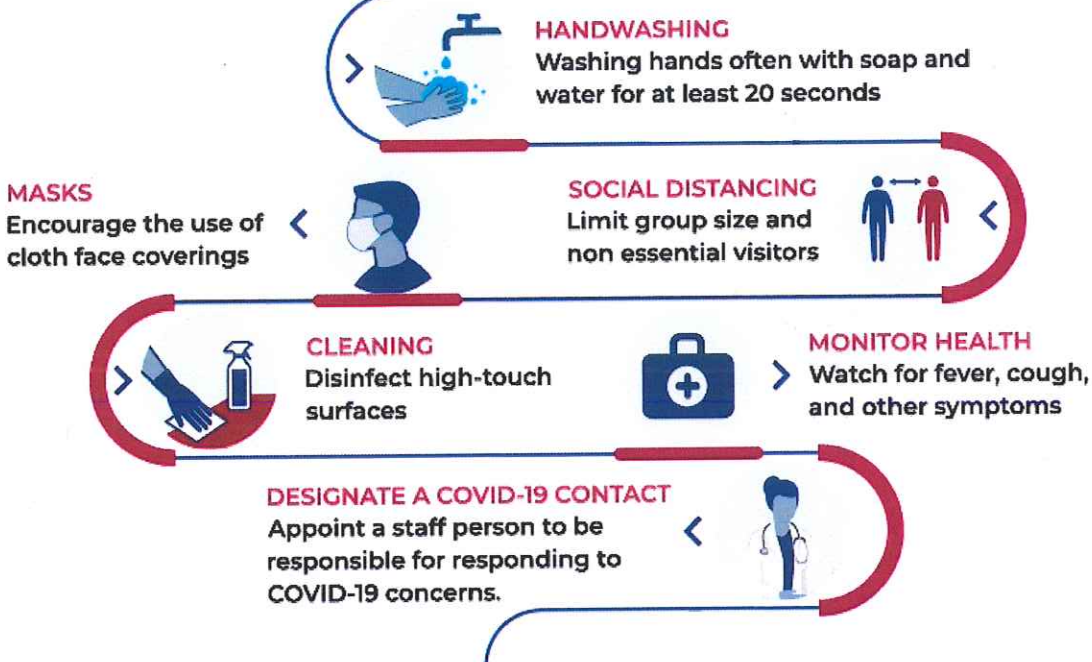
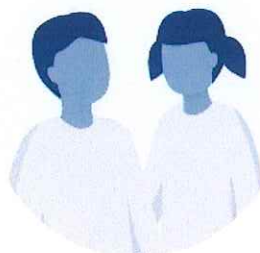
In the first installment on how to go back to school, we take a detailed look at social distancing and safety protocols, the starting place for every decision that school leaders must make. We outline recommendations, present different strategies, and weigh some pros and cons.

There are no easy solutions. Many of the recommended changes will come with new, sometimes hefty, costs.

## **SAFETY**

# How to Protect Students and Staff

Follow these safeguards, recommended by public health experts



SOURCE: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Education Week reporting

The first step is protecting students and staff as much as possible from transmission of the coronavirus. That starts with deep cleaning buildings on a regular basis and making sure students and staff are frequently washing and sanitizing their hands.

Then, school and district leaders will have to make more complex decisions: Will teachers and staff be required to wear a mask? Will students? Should schools screen for fevers before letting people into the



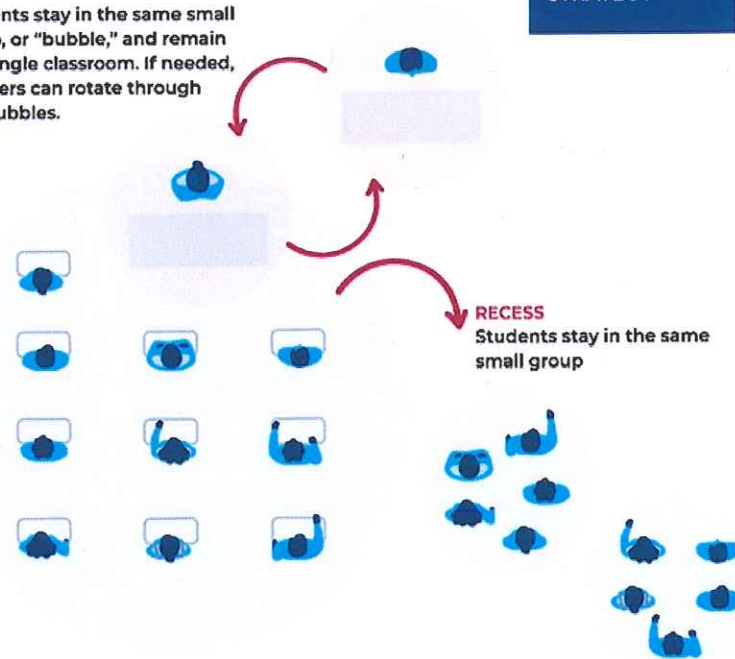
buildings? How will high-risk staff members—including those over the age of 65—be protected? Education Week talked to experts about what school leaders need to do.

- **Deep Dive:** Keeping Students and Staff Healthy and Safe When Schools Reopen

## SCHEDULES

### Limiting Exposure and Transmission

Students stay in the same small group, or "bubble," and remain in a single classroom. If needed, teachers can rotate through the bubbles.



SOURCE: Education Week reporting

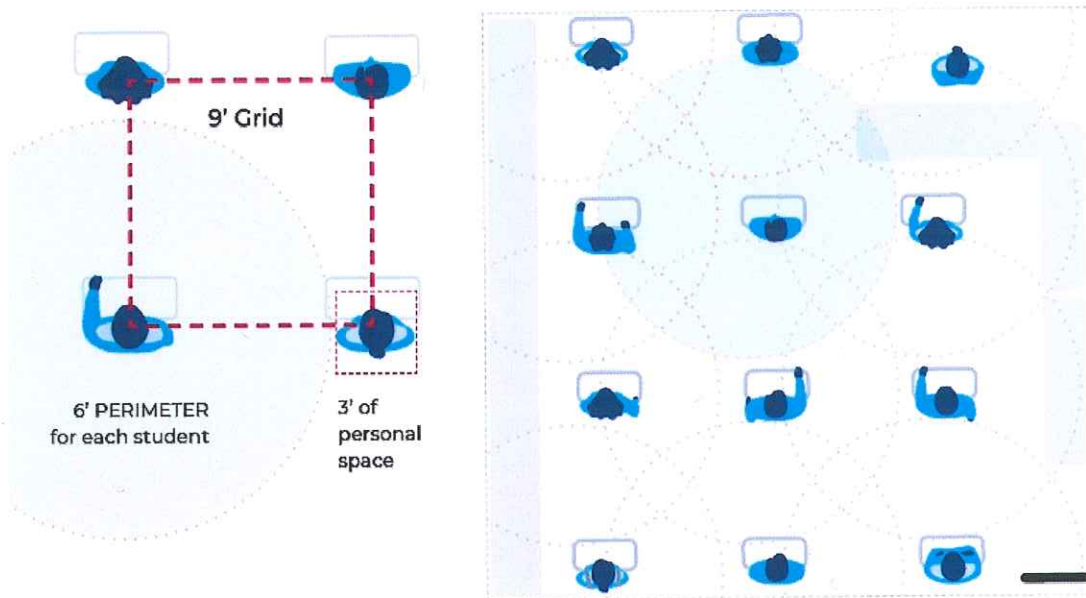
Maintaining six feet of social distancing in classrooms, buses, and common areas, such as hallways and cafeterias, will be nearly impossible if the entire student body is in the school building at once. District and school leaders will have to make significant adjustments to the schedule.

Planning for a hybrid approach of both in-person and remote instruction is necessary, but there are many ways that could work. Experts helped Education Week identify a list of a half-dozen potential models, some of which could be used simultaneously. They are: a phased reopening, a multi-track system, a staggered school day, a "bubble" method that keeps students in the same groups, a cyclical lockdown strategy, and converting to a year-round schedule.

- **Deep Dive:** 6 Ways to Bring Students and Staff Back to Schools

## STUDENTS

# Arranging Instructional Spaces



Normal capacity	Socially distanced capacity
-----------------	-----------------------------

Example: 960 square feet  
(30' x 32' room, with furniture)

31

12

SOURCE: National Council on School Facilities and Cooperative Strategies

Icons: iStock/Getty

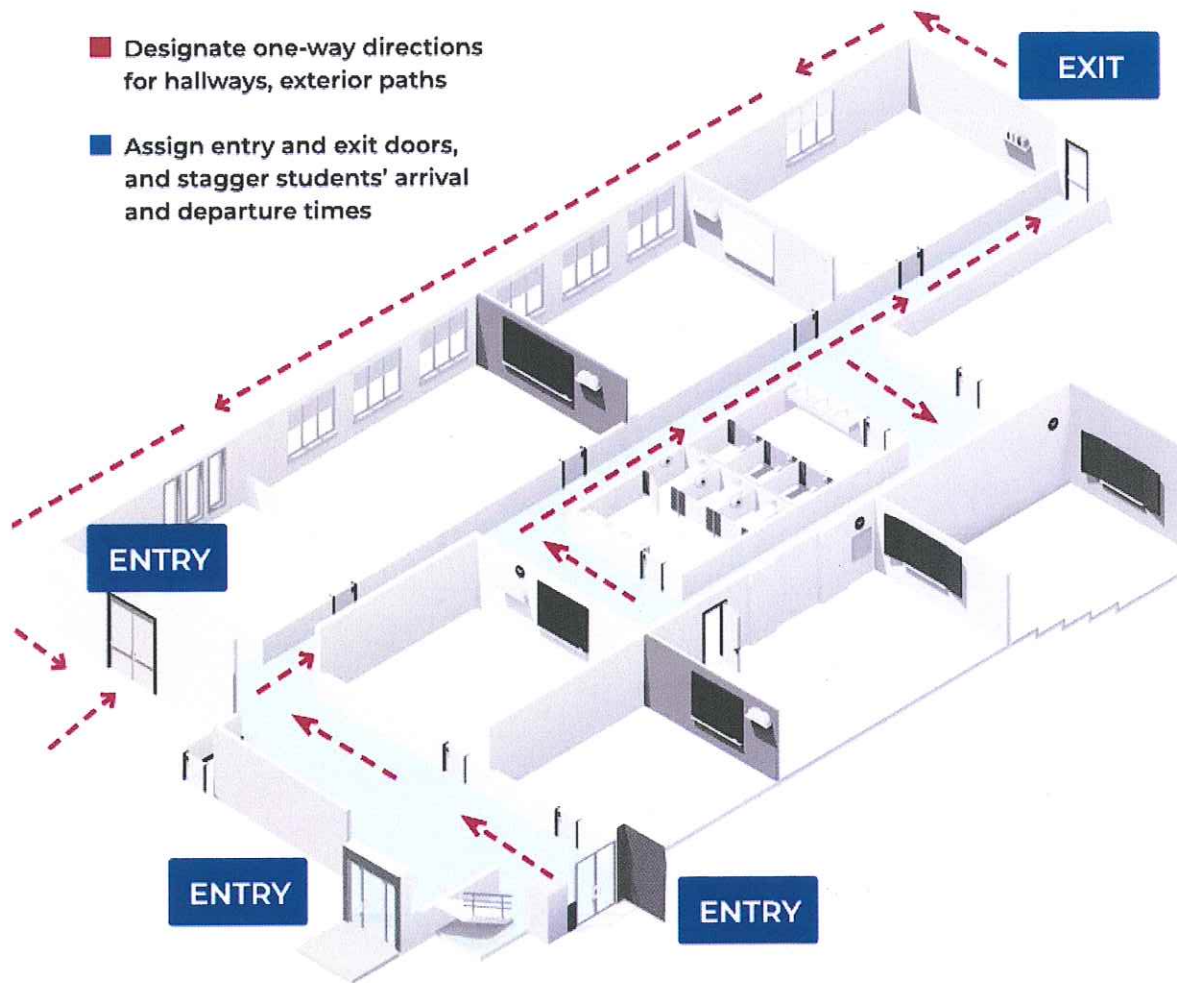
School buildings are typically set up to foster student collaboration, opportunities for socializing, and a sense of community. But now, students' day-to-day experiences will be dictated by social distancing rules and recommendations from public health authorities.

That means school leaders will have to consider—and adjust—the morning rush, classroom setups, school supplies, lunchtime, recess, and extracurriculars. They will also have to pay special attention to the most vulnerable students.

- **Deep Dive:** [The New Routines for Students When Schools Reopen](#)

## BUILDING LAYOUTS

# Minimizing Congestion



SOURCE: National Council on School Facilities and Cooperative Strategies  
Image: iStock/Getty

Retrofitting schools to accommodate six feet of distance between students and staff and sanitizing them at the levels that health experts recommend to guard against transmission of COVID-19 will be a massive and costly challenge for education leaders. They will have to rethink every space inside and outside their buildings.

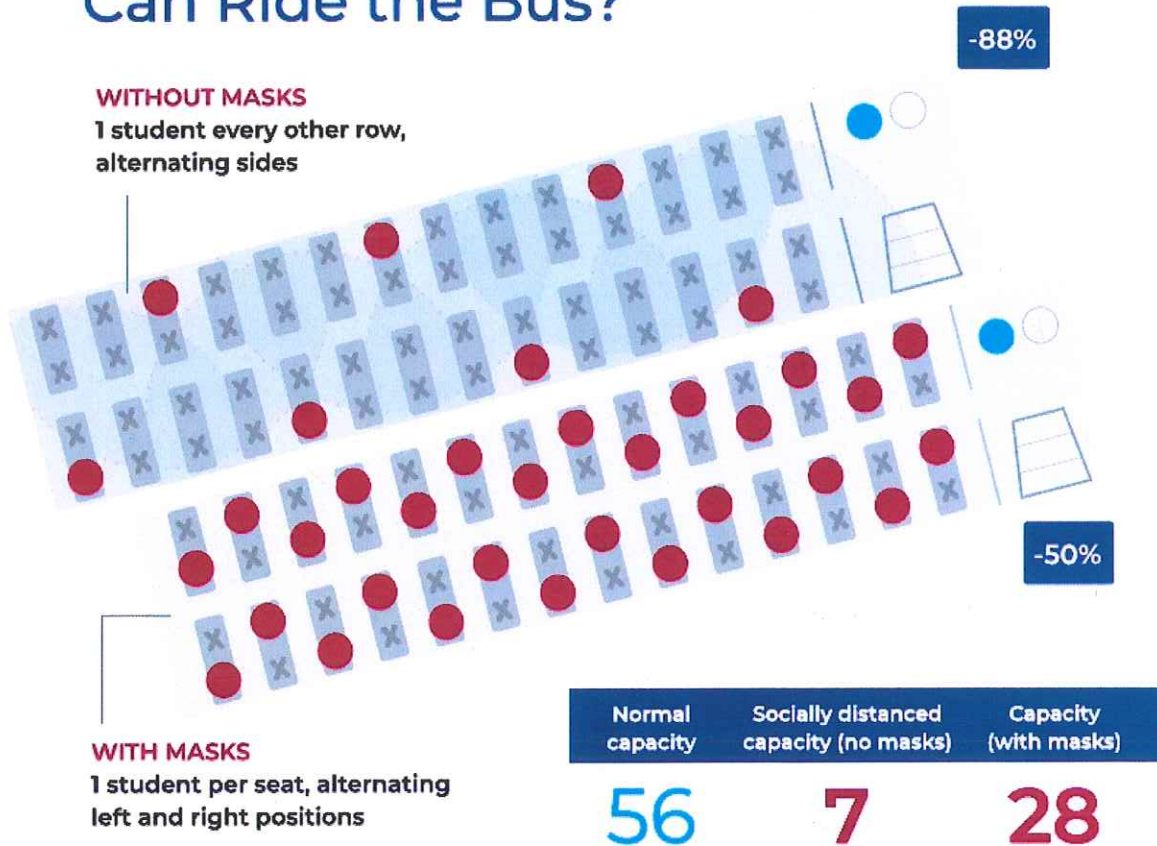
With help from the National Council on School Facilities and Cooperative Strategies, Education Week identified the major areas education leaders will have to address, as well as the estimated new costs.

- **Deep Dive:** [What Needs to Change Inside School Buildings Before They Reopen](#)
- **Downloadable Guide:** [School Buildings and Social Distancing](#)

## TRANSPORTATION



# How Many Students Can Ride the Bus?



SOURCE: National Council on School Facilities and Cooperative Strategies

Maintaining six feet of distance between students on a school bus may be the most complicated roadblock when reopening schools. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has suggested limiting ridership to one child per seat, every other row.

That would require significant modifications to the bus schedule. District leaders will have to consider how to put fewer students on the bus at once, as well as how to adequately sanitize the buses and protect the drivers.

- **Deep Dive:** [Managing Buses May Be the Hardest Part of Reopening Schools](#)
- **Downloadable Guide:** [School Buses and Social Distancing](#)

## LESSONS FROM OVERSEAS



—Photo courtesy of Dustin Rhoades/Taipei American School

Schools around the world have already reopened, giving education leaders in the United States a sense of the challenges—and opportunities—ahead.

Education Week spoke to educators in Australia, Denmark, and Taiwan to learn about the measures and precautions they are taking as students return to school. They range from reopening school buildings for just one day a week to requiring all students, even the youngest learners, to wear masks throughout the school day.

- **Deep Dive:** [How Schools in Other Countries Have Reopened](#)
- **Photo Gallery:** [A School Play in a COVID World](#)

Education Week spoke to many experts for this installment. In alphabetical order, they are:

Elizabeth Allen, the president of the National Science Teachers Association; John Bailey, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; Nathaniel Beers, a pediatrician at Children's National Hospital in Washington; Andrew Buher, the founder and managing director of Opportunity Labs; Grace Cheng Dodge, the deputy head of school for the Taipei American School; Sharon Danks, the CEO and founder of Green Schoolyards America; Dan Domenech, the executive director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association; Mary Filardo, the executive director of 21st Century School Fund; Georgina Harrison, the deputy secretary of educational services at the New South Wales Department of Education; David Hornak, the executive director of the National Association for Year-Round Education; Larry Kraut, the chief operating officer of the Taipei American School; Sandy Mackenzie, the director of the Copenhagen International School; Curt Macysyn, the executive director of the National School Transportation Association; Rob Miller, the superintendent of Bixby Public Schools in Tulsa, Okla.; Ali Mokdad, a professor at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington; Scott Muri, the superintendent of Ector County Independent school district in Odessa, Texas; Mario Ramirez, an emergency medicine physician and the managing director of Opportunity Labs; L. Oliver Robinson, the superintendent of Shenendehowa Central Schools in Clifton Park, N.Y.; Monica Rogers, the information systems manager for the Tulsa Health Department

### Contributors

Reporters: Denisa R. Superville, Madeline Will

Designers/Visual artists: Laura Baker, Emma Patti Harris

Illustrator: Stephanie Shafer for Education Week

Photo editor: Jaclyn Borowski

Web producers: Mike Bock, Stacey Decker, Hyon-Young Kim

Project editor: Lesli A. Maxwell





[Reprint or License This Article](#)

**Notice:** We recently upgraded our comments. (Learn more [here](#).) If you are logged in as a subscriber or registered user and already have a Display Name on edweek.org, you can post comments. If you do not already have a Display Name, please create one [here](#).

0 Comments Education Week [Disqus' Privacy Policy](#)

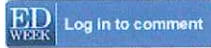
 Login


 Recommend  Tweet  Share

Sort by Oldest

 Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH



OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

Name

Email

Password

Please access our [Privacy Policy](#) to learn what personal data Disqus collects and your choices about how it is used. All users of our service are also subject to our [Terms of Service](#).



Be the first to comment.

Subscribe  Do Not Sell My Data

**Ground Rules for Posting**

We encourage lively debate, but please be respectful of others. Profanity and personal attacks are prohibited. By commenting, you are agreeing to abide by our [user agreement](#). All comments are public.

**ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT**

- Register or Subscribe
- Online Account
- Print Subscription
- Manage E-Newsletters/ Preferences
- Group Subscription

**CONTACT US**

- Help/FAQ
- Customer Service
- Editor Feedback
- Letters to the Editor

**POLICIES**

- User Agreement
- Privacy
- Reprints

**ADVERTISE WITH US**

- Display Advertising
- Recruitment Advertising

**EPE INFO**

- About Us
- Staff
- Work@EPE
- Mission and History

**EDUCATION WEEK PUBLICATIONS**

- Education Week
- Teacher
- Digital Directions
- Market Brief
- TopSchoolJobs

© 2020 Editorial Projects in Education

6935 Arlington Road, Bethesda MD 20814 1-800-346-1834 (Main Office) 1-800-445-8250 (Customer Service)