

Guidance for Entry, Dismissal, Circulation and Use of Public Assembly Spaces in School Buildings

Currently, the State Department of Health (SDOH) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) are mandating that schools follow Four Core Actions for Prevention of COVID-19 when schools reopen in September, specifically: maintaining a physical distance of six feet, wearing face coverings, providing increased opportunities for handwashing or access to hand sanitizer, and staying home when sick.

As staff and students re-enter school buildings in September, they will need to comply with physical distancing guidelines and maintain a distance of six feet at all times while wearing a face covering when on school property. These new guidelines, which are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, will significantly change how students and staff move throughout the building during the day. Co-located school leaders must work collaboratively to ensure that policies and procedures impacting all building occupants are aligned. The general guidance below will help you as principals to implement new practices to ensure compliance with physical distancing.

General Health Protocols

- Please refer to “Daily Health Screenings” in the [COVID-19 School Health Policy](#).
- Physical distancing guidelines and mandatory use of face coverings must be enforced for all individuals while in the building. Exceptions to face covering usage are as follows:
 - Medically verified students who cannot tolerate a face covering, including where students with such coverings would impair their physical or mental health,
 - Where the use of face covering is inappropriate considering the development level or age of the student (e.g. under two years old)
 - The DOE will communicate, educate, and reinforce personal protective behaviors (i.e. wearing face coverings, physical distancing, hand hygiene, staying home when sick) to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools with families engaged as full partners in this process.
 - Additional guidance on enforcing the mandatory use of face coverings is forthcoming.
- Appropriate signage (e.g., six-foot space markings and directional signs) should be used outdoors as needed and must be visible upon entry and throughout school buildings, including entrances, exits, classrooms, offices, public assembly spaces and corridors.
- Signage, face coverings, and other forms of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as hand sanitizer, gloves, and thermometers, will be provided by Central.
- Hand sanitizing dispensers will be installed throughout co-located spaces and high traffic areas.
- Wellness barriers will be provided by Central, to be placed in the general office, and at the main school safety desk.
- Co-located schools will receive a wellness barrier for each school’s general office.

- Custodians will sanitize school building on a regular basis. Cleaning and disinfection will include all high touch surfaces: classrooms, desks & chairs, conference tables, drinking fountains, door handles and push plates, conference tables, light switches, restroom fixtures, partitions and hardware, buttons on hardware, buttons on vending machines, elevator buttons, gym padding, and physical therapy equipment.

General Student Entry Procedures

- School entry procedures must align with health and safety measures related to temperature checks. Please refer to Health Policy for up-to-date guidance on temperature check protocols.
- Schools and campuses with sufficient staffing to accommodate multiple points of entry should identify these multiple points of entry and ensure that students report to classrooms and avoid shared spaces at the beginning of the day.
- Each point of entry must be supervised by sufficient staff to ensure that students are supported in maintaining physical distancing and using PPE.
- This includes staff presence outside the school building to support students and families lining up for entry.
- Staff will be identified by the principal and/or Building Response Team (BRT) Leader in collaboration with BRT.
- Staff assigned to morning entry and dismissal may include administrators, school aides, deans, clerical staff, School Safety Agents, and Circular 6 staff.
- If possible, it is highly recommended that school counselors and social workers be assigned to morning entry or designated locations to support any students exhibiting signs of distress.
- School must ensure all students (or their families on their behalf) have completed a health screening before entering the school; refer to “Daily Health Screenings” in the [COVID-19 School Health Policy](#). Additional guidance is forthcoming.
- Students are recommended to arrive with their own face coverings, and if they do not have a face covering, one will be provided before entering the school building.
 - Schools must implement single file line up with six feet markers and identified traffic patterns with directional markings.
- Signage identifying the morning entry protocols and outlining the four DOHMH core actions must be conspicuously posted at points of entry and within the lobby. Signage will be available in multiple languages.
- Upon entry to the building, students will be directed to their assigned classrooms (six feet from one another) and have the ability to collect breakfast (grab and go) at entry.
- Students must clean hands with sanitizer or with soap and water after entry and before entering class.

Entry Procedures for Designated Scanning Sites:

- It should be noted that given the reduction of enrollment on any given day, the process of scanning should be manageable under this new practice of morning entry.
- While it is highly recommended that schools utilize multiple points of entry, this may not be feasible at all scanning sites.
 - Some scanning sites may be able to identify primary and secondary points of entry while others, based on the configuration of the building, will only be able to utilize one point of entry.
- To avoid congestion after scanning, it is highly recommended that all necessary daily health screenings occur before scanning.
- It is highly recommended that schools suspend any cell phone collection process until students are fully acclimated to the new morning entry procedures.
- Floor markings of six feet in distance and directional markers should be placed by custodial staff to ensure that students comply with physical distancing guidelines while waiting for scanning.
- It is recommended that school staff, including School Safety Agents, are present at the exterior of the building to support line up for entry and ensure physical distancing compliance.
- School Safety Agents must ensure that physical distancing guidelines are followed as students transition through scanning.
- Additional guidance on restorative practices and supporting students during scanning will be forthcoming.
- Floor markings and directional markers, as well as box markers on the floor, should be placed to ensure students and agents are complying with physical distancing guidelines while hand-washing.
- Any student found in possession of a prohibited item will be taken to the dean's office where the matter will be appropriately addressed while complying with physical distancing guidelines.
- After students complete the scanning process, school staff and School Safety Agents will direct students to the designated stairwells and/or corridors to proceed directly to their assigned classroom (six feet from one another) and avoid communal areas (i.e., cafeterias, auditoriums, lockers areas, etc.).
- Scanners will be cleaned regularly in accordance with cleaning guidelines.

Entry Procedures for Early Childhood

- For 3-K & Pre-K students and their families, the transition at the beginning of the school year is particularly important for their emotional well-being and social-emotional development as students separate from their primary caregivers and attend school for the first time.
- In our current moment of increased stress and anxiety, additional considerations should be made for children under the age of five to help them feel a sense of security; this will facilitate a smoother transition to in-person learning.

- Where needed, ensure caregivers are able to accompany their 3-K & Pre-K children to their classroom doors during the first month of school.
- Some young children may need family support past the first month of school to reduce separation anxiety and support their transition to their new classroom setting. This is normal, and schools should work with families and caregivers to support each child according to their needs. The Division of Early Childhood can provide additional guidance and coaching in individual cases where young children are especially dysregulated and staff may need additional support.
- Recommended practices for safely allowing families of young children into the building at arrival:
 - All adults must follow all health and safety protocols, including visitor health screening upon arrival, physical distancing, and use of face coverings. Schools should restate and post expectations where they can be seen by all adults.
 - Schools may choose to establish a “Pre-K & 3-K for All Only” entrance to accommodate new arrival and dismissal expectations.
 - School may need to stagger drop off for early childhood classes by 10-minute intervals and ensure that caregivers dropping off children at the classroom door are maintaining physical distancing of at least six feet from other families and staff.

Student Circulation

- School leaders must create plans to support movement that upholds physical distancing throughout the building, e.g. the use of one directional stairwells and single file travel patterns.
- Elevator use should be limited to individuals with special needs or in high-rise buildings and should be operated at limited capacity as per current DOHMH guidance (2 persons per elevator), and face coverings must be worn at all times.
- Face coverings must be worn at all times except while eating or drinking.
- Per SDOH guidelines, appropriate signage, e.g., directional markers and physical distancing guidelines, must be displayed on walls and floors throughout all travel routes.
- Travel areas should be appropriately staffed to support students with physical distancing guidelines.
- To reduce movement throughout the building, teachers should travel from class to class, with students remaining in the same room throughout the day to the extent possible. If students have to travel proper social distancing protocols should be followed.
- Where possible, students should remain with the same group of students, in a cohort, throughout the day.
- DOE is developing additional guidance as it relates to cohorts and grades. DOE will support creation of cohorts wherever possible.
- Where feasible, co-located schools should have designated hallways and stairwells. For co-located campuses, Building Council discussion should take place in order to norm student movement.

Bathroom Usage (For Students and Staff)

- Bathroom use must not exceed established cap (based on physical distancing guidelines) at any given time.
- Schools may adjust how bathrooms are used to accommodate for physical distancing requirements, e.g., use of alternate stalls and/or sinks.
- Appropriate signage regarding hand washing and physical distancing must be displayed.
- Where feasible, co-located schools should have designated bathrooms

Isolation Room

- Refer to “Isolation Room” in the [COVID-19 School Health Policy](#).

Public Assembly Spaces

- Use of large assembly spaces (e.g. cafeterias, auditoriums, libraries, and gymnasiums) must comply with physical distancing guidelines.
- These areas may be used as additional classroom spaces in lieu of their traditional use.
- Cafeterias may be used for instructional spaces depending on school need. Cafeterias may only be used for food service for students who are receiving their instruction there. Cafeterias must adhere to the same health and safety protocols in classroom settings. School leaders should refer to [Physical Education Expectations for In-Person and Remote Instruction Policy](#) making decisions regarding the use of gymnasiums.
- Spaces accommodate different sections of students on any given day. As always, Building Councils in co-located campuses must agree on how spaces will be shared and used.
- Building Council decisions around the allocation of shared space should be driven by several factors, including number of shared spaces, number of schools, number of students in each school, as well as selected instruction models will require cleaning between uses.
- Some approaches which may be applied to the decision-making process, using the cafeteria and auditorium spaces as examples, include:
 - Space Designation - In this scenario school A utilizes the cafeteria exclusively as classroom space while School B utilizes the auditorium exclusively.
 - Alternating Days - In this scenario school A utilizes the cafeteria on Mondays and Wednesdays while School B uses it on Tuesdays and Fridays.
 - Rotation Schedule - In this scenario Schools A and B utilize the cafeteria and auditorium respectively one week and schools C and D utilize it the following week. This rotation would repeat in subsequent weeks.

Exterior Spaces/Play Yards

- Multiple cohorts of students may use larger exterior spaces concurrently, provided that physical distancing is practiced between and within cohorts and students are well supervised.
- Blending of different cohorts or school organizations should not be permitted as it could complicate contact tracing efforts and increase risk of transmission.
- Co-located schools should ensure that spaces are shared equitably and safely.
- Ground markings may be used to encourage physical distancing.
- Schools should endeavor to maximize the use of outdoor space for multiple uses, including instruction where feasible and appropriate.

Student Dismissal

- Schools must adopt procedures that allow students to engage in physical distancing while exiting the building.
- Additional school personnel should be deployed strategically to assist students.
- Schools must identify designated points of egress.
- Schools should consider the use of staggered dismissal times and multiple exits.
- Co-located schools should use separate exits to the extent possible.
- For students being dismissed, e.g., play yards, physical distancing markers and directional signs must be in use.
- Families must be aware of exit procedures and encouraged to arrive at designated times to avoid congestion.
- Assign staff to school yard or exterior of school to encourage students and parents to not congregate outside.
- Conspicuously post signage at points of egress identifying the dismissal protocols and outlining the four DOHMH tenets. Signage will be available in multiple languages, etc.

Visitors

- In an effort to limit the number of visitors in a school at any given time, schools are encouraged, where possible, to address all visitor and parent concerns by phone or computer.
 - Principals and designated staff should conduct meetings remotely where possible (e.g. Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meets).
- When it is necessary to hold a meeting in person, all visitors are required to follow the visitor control protocols, including complying with physical distancing requirements and wearing a face covering.
 - In order to avoid hand-to-hand contact, it is highly recommended that schools provide multiple writing tools for visitors to sign in.
 - Visitors must leave their names and contact information in the event they need to be notified for COVID-19 purposes.

- All visitors must receive a visitor's pass, which must be returned upon exiting the building.
- All visitors must be escorted to and from the meeting destination, in order to prevent visitors from accessing unauthorized areas, limiting the possibility of exposure.
- If a parent is called to the school to pick up their child, the child must be brought to the main lobby to meet the parent.
- Non-essential individuals should not be allowed to enter school buildings.
- All packages are to be delivered to the main lobby in a manner consistent with social distancing protocols, or to another location if proper social distancing cannot be met with lobby deliveries.
- Practices must be developed to eliminate the need for families to enter school buildings to drop off or pick up children
- Co-located schools must be aligned on policies governing how adults are allowed to enter and traverse the building.

Optimizing Building Councils Co-locations

- Co-located schools must leverage their building structure to adequately prepare for the use of shared buildings.
- School leaders should conduct frequent virtual meetings over the summer (a minimum of three) to ensure sufficient communication and ample time to review and implement guidance from Central.
- In the fall, school leaders should consider holding weekly Building Council meetings to immediately address issues that surface.
- Members must work collaboratively to make decisions on issues that impact the safety and well-being of the entire building, including but not limited to:
 - Re-design of shared space utilization
 - Traffic flow throughout the building, including entry and exit procedures
 - Bathroom protocols
 - Protocols for visitors
- The decision-making process should be one that ensures equity and safety for all.
- District and Charter school Building Council members should share information, guidance, and decision deadlines with one another so that everyone is operating on the same set of facts and understandings.
- School leaders should consider collaborating on the draft of building-wide procedures to be shared with staff, students, and families.
- Every possible attempt should be made to resolve conflict prior to reaching out to the Office of Campus Governance in the Division of Space Management.