Preparing School Buildings for Reopening After COVID-19

As the current COVID-19 outbreak subsides and schools are reopened, several safety measures will need to be put into place to keep students and staff safe. The following protocols are a helpful start for achieving this goal. A local health professional should be consulted to ensure compliance with local regulations.

1. PREPARE THE SCHOOL FACILITY
   - Follow guidelines and best practices for cleaning and sanitizing the building.
   - Update facility cleaning schedule.
   - Create floor markings to direct foot-traffic flow.
   - Re-engage facility vendors.
   - Complete inspections and repairs of all building systems.
   - Display COVID-19 informational signs.
   - Reconfigure shared spaces to encourage social distancing practices.
   - Install protective panels for frontline office and food service team members.

2. CREATE AND COMMUNICATE A SOCIAL DISTANCING PLAN
   - Develop schoolwide social distancing strategies.
   - Restrict the use of spaces that don’t allow for social distancing.
   - Prohibit large groups from gathering in shared spaces.
   - Develop social distancing guidelines and protocols for school guests and visitors.
   - Communicate social distancing strategies.
   - Survey families for their willingness to return to the school building and address their concerns.

3. PROMOTE STAFF AND STUDENT SANITATION AND HYGIENE
   - Provide cleaning and disinfecting supplies.
   - Provide personal hygiene equipment.
   - Educate students and their families on proper personal hygiene and sanitation practices.
   - Limit the number of shared items in the classroom.
   - Clean personal workspace and tools.
   - Have students wash their hands throughout the day.

4. MONITOR STAFF AND STUDENT HEALTH
   - Track staff and student absenteeism.
   - Develop flexible attendance and sick leave policies.
   - Train staff to recognize signs that a student is ill and on how to properly care for them.
   - Hire or contract for school nursing services.
   - Notify families when a student or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19.
   - Educate families on when they should make the decision to keep their child home due to illness.

5. PROVIDE ENHANCED LEARNING SUPPORTS
   - Develop an assessment plan.
   - Provide enhanced learning supports.
   - Give teachers time to collaboratively plan and realign curriculum to account for lost learning time.
   - Provide access to counseling services.

6. CREATE AN EMERGENCY PLAN FOR FUTURE OUTBREAKS
   - Carefully monitor national, state and local COVID-19 virus spreading indicators.
   - Develop protocol for isolating any individual exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.
   - Develop a communication plan notifying staff, parents and community officials in the event that a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19.
   - Develop guidelines for when the school should close due to an outbreak and move to an online learning environment.
   - Develop and continue to make improvements to a robust digital and remote learning plan.
   - Develop a plan to provide food for students eligible for free and reduced-priced meals.
   - Determine how financial impacts from COVID-19 will impact your school’s budget.

THE SAFE SCHOOL SIX

1. Constantly reinforce hand washing, social distancing and staying home when ill.
2. Create and communicate a social distancing plan.
3. Promote staff and student sanitation and hygiene.
4. Monitor staff and student health.
5. Provide enhanced learning supports.
6. Create an emergency plan for future outbreaks.

The Institute would like to thank Cushman & Wakefield for their thought leadership on the subject of safety and reopening buildings post COVID-19. Many of their ideas are included in the Institute’s version of a school reopening checklist.