

Tools to Evolve Your COVID-19 Schools Strategy: Seminar Summary

OVERVIEW

On June 5, 2020, the CDC Foundation, in collaboration with Leavitt Partners, National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, hosted an online seminar for education leaders to support them in making decisions that will mitigate the risks of COVID-19 to students and staff when schools reopen. The seminar began with presentations from public health leaders, who provided timely insights into existing resources and tools and presented a risk analysis framework that businesses can use to inform operational decisions; the framework and instructions for using it are now available for download on [CDC Foundation's website](#). Then, education leaders illustrated how to apply the framework by sharing examples of risk mitigation in the classroom, school hallways, and on buses. Afterwards two senior officials from the state of Mississippi talked about how they are working with schools and public health experts to help local school leaders make the best decisions for their communities.

SPEAKERS

- Judy Monroe, MD, CDC Foundation President and CEO
- Governor Mike Leavitt, former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services
- Grant Baldwin, Ph.D., MPH, Director of the Division of Overdose Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Catherine Rasberry, Ed.D, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Bo Nemelka, MPH, Principal, Leavitt Partners
- Robert Hull, Ph.D., President and CEO of the National Association of State Boards of Education
- Anna Maria Chávez, JD, Executive Director and CEO of the National School Boards Association
- Dan Domenech, Ph.D., Executive Director of AASA the School Superintendents Association
- Jason Dean, Ph.D, Chair of the Mississippi State Board of Education
- Thomas Dobbs, MD MPH, Mississippi State Public Health Director

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We must adapt how we do business in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides guidance on how to limit the spread of COVID-19. Administrators in each school and school district will have to determine how to best implement this guidance in their community according to the resources available and needs of the children and families they serve.

- A framework¹ developed by Leavitt Partners can be applied with guidance to assess school-specific settings and limit the exposure of the virus for children, staff, and parents.

Overview of COVID-19 and Available CDC Tools – Dr. Grant Baldwin, CDC

Dr. Baldwin stated that the virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

He discussed the challenges for schools given the wide variation in school facilities and community needs. Appropriate mitigation strategies depend on the level of community transmission, characteristics of community and populations, and public health and healthcare capacity, encouraging close collaboration with local public health officials to guide decisions. Ways to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 include use of personal protective measures (e.g., handwashing, cough etiquette, and face coverings) and social distancing. Given there are multiple approaches to reduce the spread, each with different challenges, the CDC recommends using a variety of approaches layered together to maximize protection.

CDC Tools and Resources

- Latest COVID-19 information : www.cdc.gov/coronavirus
- COVID prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html>
- Decision tree for schools: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools-decision-tool.html>
- Considerations for schools: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
- Handwashing information: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>
- Cloth face coverings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
- Cleaning and disinfection: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>
- CDC communication resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>
- People at higher risk: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
- Ending home isolation: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>
- Managing stress and anxiety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- [FAQ for children with special health care needs](#)

¹ Poelman, J., Doxey, P., Hanson, A., & Heins, Z. (2020). *Understanding the coronavirus and situational characteristics: A framework for individuals and businesses for mitigating risk* [White paper]. Leavitt Partners.

Situational Characteristics to Consider and How They Apply to Different Settings

The framework consists of seven “situational characteristics,” which are elements of environments or situations that may be categorized as higher or lower risk: movement, duration, proximity, respiratory output, group size, touch, and congestion. School administrators and staff can apply the framework to solve practical problems when guidance is not available. Please see the Appendix for a more detailed description of the framework.

School Scenario Planning and Panel Discussion

1. Classrooms

- a. **High-Risk Considerations:** Classrooms are high touch areas, facing longer duration of students being together, with congestion at the entry points.
- b. **Mitigation:** Spread out seating to appropriate distance, avoid sharing supplies.

2. Hallways/Changing Classes

- a. **High-Risk Considerations:** While duration is shorter in a passing period, it is very hard to control proximity, group size and congestion.
- b. **Mitigation:** Consider directional guidance through hallways, reconsidering schedules and room assignments to minimize travel distance, require face coverings in the hallway.

3. Buses

- a. **High-Risk Considerations:** Touch, respiratory output, and proximity are high risk factors.
- b. **Mitigation:** Limit number of children on buses if possible, which could also reduce duration. Thorough cleaning between runs. Supervision critical to reduce crowding, minimize respiratory output.

Collaboration with Public Health

Collaboration with local public health officials is important for K-12 schools and may include consultation and relationships with state and local departments of health. In Mississippi, the public health director is in close communication with the governor’s office and is working directly with school boards and administrators at the state and local level to address community concerns, particularly athletics and recreational programs. Two-way communication helps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep children and staff healthy. For a listing of state and territorial public health websites, please [click here](#).

CDC Foundation Tools

The CDC Foundation acknowledges that guidance is not a one-size-fits-all approach. A structured approach, such as applying the seven situational characteristics to one’s unique setting, will support school administrators in assessing the risk profile of their own facilities and making plans to mitigate risk.

To download tools and apply the framework to one’s own settings, visit:

<https://www.cdcfoundation.org/covid-19-seminars>

APPENDIX

Situational Characteristic	Lower Risk Characteristic		Higher Risk Characteristic	
Movement How do people move around in the space?	Directed	Movement is restrained or highly controlled, people are confined to a specific area, little intermingling.	Undirected	Movement is unrestrained or uncontrolled, people can wander in the space, frequent intermingling.
Duration How long are people in this space?	Less than 15 minutes	Less than 15 minutes is typically spent in the space.	Greater than 15 minutes	More than 15 minutes is typically spent in the place.
Proximity How close are people in this space?	Greater than 6 feet	It is possible, either naturally or with minimal interventions, to maintain a 6-foot distance.	Less than 6 feet	It is not possible to maintain a 6-foot distance; the activity cannot be done if distance is maintained.
Group Size How many people are in the space?	Less than recommended limit	A small group of people, mostly part of the same social circle.	Greater than recommended limit	A large group of people from different households and social circles.
Respiratory Output How are people breathing in the space?	Normal	People are breathing normally, low respiratory output.	Increased	People are breathing heavily, from exercising, laughing, cheering, singing, etc.
Touch How do people engage with objects or fixtures in the space?	Low	People do not interact much with each other or with objects in the space.	High	People frequently interact with each other or touch objects in the space.
Congestion Are there points of high congestion?	Low	The design of the space and activity do not result in congregations of people (e.g. entry points, lines, security, etc.)	High	Because of the design of the space or the nature of the activity, people must gather closely together at times.

These situational characteristics help categorize the “risk” level of a space and can be used as a prompt to think through what mitigation strategies can be employed to offset risk.