
CHARTERS



SCHOOL REOPENING TOOLKIT: CHARTER SCHOOLS

This document highlights key practices that charter schools can employ in advance of charter schools' safe and efficient re-opening of campuses to students, staff, and families. This list of recommended activities is not all-inclusive, and charter school leaders should engage extensively with their authorizing entity to coordinate campus expectations with those of their LEA.

As charter schools determine approaches to resuming instructional activities in a safe and thoughtful manner, the department's charter schools team stands ready to assist in planning and technical assistance supports. Please contact the team at Charter.Schools@tn.gov or by calling (615) 253-1767.

All information in the document is non-regulatory guidance issued for general informational purposes only. This document is not intended to constitute legal advice. Because local school board policy and unique facts make dramatic differences in analyzing any situation, the Tennessee Department of Education advises each school district to consult with the local school board attorney for specific legal advice regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school operations.

II. Checklist

Facility Preparation

Prior to students' return to school buildings, it is important that charter school leaders undertake thorough facility preparation to ensure both the sanitization of all relevant facilities and the structuring of learning environments in a manner that decreases the likelihood of illness.

- Ensure thorough cleaning and disinfecting of all school facilities, buses, equipment, books, and other relevant supplies. (In the event that a charter school employs outside contractors for specific services, it is important that leaders stress the same expectations to vendors and receive verification that these preparation activities have occurred.)
- Conduct a thorough audit of existing classroom seating plans and determine the extent to which current furniture can be organized to allow for social distancing between students.
 - Classrooms utilizing group tables should identify those seating areas that will intentionally be blocked. As a rule of thumb, assume that existing table capacity should be decreased by half to ensure adequate social distancing (e.g., tables previously accommodating six students should be “right-sized” to three; tables accommodating four to two, etc.). Explicitly mark designated student work areas, dedicated distancing spaces, and seating positions with painter’s tape or other similar visual cues.
 - Classrooms utilizing individual student desks should stagger their arrangement to allow several feet of distance between them. To the extent possible, desk positions should remain stationary and should in all cases be explicitly marked.
 - Identify any supplemental areas of the facility (e.g. library, intervention areas, technology labs, etc.) that may be utilized in the event that socially distanced classroom capacity is insufficient for specified instructional activities, as well as furniture that should be re-directed from classrooms to these areas.
- Inspect communal areas (e.g., courtyards, cafeteria, auditorium, entrance to locker rooms, etc.) to identify areas that could be subject to students congregating in close proximity.
 - In areas subject to student congestion, identify specific positions and timeframes for adults to monitor movement and supervise students in a safe manner.
 - Create and post explicit signage demonstrating expectations for social distancing within those spaces in a developmentally appropriate format. (Elementary and early childhood campuses should utilize pictorial cues. Schools and communities with significant ELL populations should provide information in multiple languages.)
 - In any communal spaces that students utilize on a consistently scheduled basis (e.g., cafeteria, auditorium, etc.), explicitly designate permissible seating areas as well as distancing between students in lines, transitions, etc. In addition to specific demarcation of seats and/or floor areas, utilize laminated diagram, signage, and/or digital projectors to reiterate expectations to students and staff.

Communication with Students & Families

Many families are understandably uncertain as they consider sending their students back into a campus environment, and it will therefore likely require explicit demonstration of the systems and safeguards their school(s) will employ to ensure student wellness and safety.

- Confirm any messaging being sent directly to parents by your supervising LEA to ensure information provided by your school is not duplicative or contradictory.
- Schedule opportunities for parents and families to learn specifically about the procedures and expectations your charter school will employ this school year. Key topics for discussion may include:
 - the specific routines and expectations that students will be expected to follow in order to ensure health and safety;
 - How classroom and other learning spaces will be structured to ensure adequate social distancing;
 - how parents and families can best prepare their children for a smooth start to the school year under the current circumstances;
 - COVID-19 health resources and information; and
 - school contact information for parents' and families' questions.
- Some families will wish to see firsthand how the school has been structured to ensure their students' safety, while others will wish to participate virtually. Schedule multiple meetings in both socially-distanced in-person as well as virtual settings, and record these sessions so that families unable to attend can access the resources.
- Include translation services in these meetings to ensure parents have the opportunity to ask questions in their native language.

III. Best Practices

Re-Examine Campus Schedules & Procedures

- It will be important to consider whether additional time will now be required for specific campus and classroom procedures (e.g., restroom breaks, cafeteria lines, class transitions, end-of-day dismissal, etc.) that now must include social distancing precautions.
- In addition, leaders will wish to identify any and all times and locations in which adult supervision will be required to ensure student adherence to social distancing expectations. When in doubt, budget additional staff capacity to ensure these duties are explicitly scheduled rather than improvised.

Staff Training

Campus-wide student safety and consistent social distancing can only occur if all adults on a school site are reinforcing expectations and routines.

- Allocate targeted blocks of time during faculty & staff pre-service training to practice safety systems & routines.
- It is critical that all faculty and staff are able to observe explicit modeling of the practices they are expected to emulate and practice these routines until they demonstrate mastery.
- Charter school leaders should not only furnish teachers and support staff with detailed guidance on how classroom systems and routines may require modification based on these guidelines, but also specific days, times, and locations where they will be needed to supervise students.
- Charter school leaders may also ask teachers and support staff to generate ideal responses to scenarios that may occur in the course of their supervision of students in a socially distanced and safe manner.
- Before teachers and support staff are permitted to interact directly with students, they should demonstrate their understanding and adoption of campus expectations and safety-related procedures in both their classroom and broader campus settings.

Dedicate Time for Students to Practice Campus Safety Systems & Expectations

Regardless of their grade level, students may feel uneasy or unfamiliar with newly-adopted systems and expectations this year. It is therefore more important than ever that they are provided not just with explicit teaching in these areas, but also opportunities to practice and demonstrate full comprehension.

- Explicit instruction on campus safety systems and procedures should be reinforced throughout the student's academic day. Every teacher should be equipped to deliver a consistent message to students on expectations specific to their classroom and the campus as a whole.
- Some teachers may be tempted to jump too quickly back into academic content and not devote adequate time and attention to explicit teaching of student safety expectations. It is imperative that charter school leaders directly review teachers' instructional plans to ensure appropriate time and forethought is allocated to this critical learning.
- Moreover, leaders should be present and visible in classrooms to gauge the effectiveness of this instruction and practice and, if needed, identify areas for re-teaching by faculty and staff.

IV. Resource List

Charter Schools

<https://www.tn.gov/education/school-options/charter-schools.html>

Link to information on charter schools on the department's website

<https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>

Link to Charter Schools FAQ – COVID-19 Guidance