



SAFER SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES **BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE**

Lessons from the Field - Strategies for Safely Returning to School: The Latest Federal Guidance

Wednesday, July 14, 2021 | 3:00 - 4:00 PM ET

Transcript

Tim Duffy:

Good afternoon, and welcome everyone to today's Lesson from the Field Webinar, Strategies for Safely Returning to School: The Latest Federal Guidance. On behalf of the US Department of Education, we're pleased to have you join us today. In fact, some 1,200 people have registered for today's webinar. Additional people will certainly be joining as we kick off in our participant pool. Thanks to all of you who are already online with us.

My name is Tim Duffy, training specialist of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSE, and I'll be moderating today's webinar. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. To learn more about NCSSE, and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website. To give you a sense of what that website looks like and what it includes, here we share an image of our homepage on the left side of the screen, along with some of our most popular products on the right side of the screen.

Please note also that all materials that you'll see today, including the slides, referenced resources, and the archived version of the recording will be available on the event webpage within this website. Some items including the slides and bios for today's speakers, in fact, have already been posted to that site.

Please also note that you can access previous Lesson from the Field sessions by visiting the webinar series web page, which you'll also see listed here in the lower right corner, and which we will post in the chat for your reference and access.

I just want to remind you to monitor the chat for links throughout the session today, and to use the Q&A opportunity to let us know of any issues and/or questions you might have. This might be a good time just to mention to all of you that we appreciated the questions you submitted to us at the time of registering and those questions have informed the content that's being provided to you today.

Alright, before I review our agenda for today and introduce our first speaker, we want to take just a minute or two here to ask two quick polling questions. So, Claire, if you can activate those polls for folks, there we go. You'll see one above the other here. The first is a question about role. We invite you to choose from among the six alternatives here, which role best reflects your position, as you join us today; school administrator, teacher, other school staff, state education agency staff, a parent or a community member.

Select from among those and again, which one best represents your role. That would be fantastic. Then below that, if you take a moment to just select what form of instruction is currently being planned for opening the school year in your community for this fall. Is that in-person instruction fully, fully virtual, a hybrid of those two options, or is that unknown, or is that for some reason not applicable in your case? You can pick from among those options, please.

Okay, Claire, I think we can probably close that poll. Let's take a look at those results, if we can. In the first question, in today's audience, it looks like the strongest represented group is administrators, followed by state education agency staff, and other school staff. Great, good to have you all here, regardless of role.

Then for question two, 79% are responding for in-person instruction being the case, followed next by hybrid at 13%. All right, good. All right. The presenters, that's helpful information for you as we look at moving ahead.

All right, let's take a look at our agenda for today. After we finish up this introduction and logistics section, which we're nearly done with, we'll be kicking off the event with two important federal updates of key information. First, at item two from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and then at item three in the agenda from the Department of Education. After an overview from those two speakers, we have a panel discussion of those folks led by our moderator for the rest of the session, in which we'll dig into common questions related to guidance for returning to school in the fall as we continue to contend with the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Then there'll be a brief wrap up and closing just the last few minutes.

That's where we're headed. Hope that's helpful for all of you. With that, I would like to introduce you to the first speaker for today, Christian Rhodes, who is the Chief of Staff of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the US Department of Education. As Christian introduces the other speakers for today's session, please know that bios for all speakers from today are included, again on

the event page, listed on this slide and again shared in the chat box. Christian, I'll turn it over to you.

Christian Rhodes:

Thank you, Tim, and thanks for all those who are participating today. It's always great to be with you. Thanks to those who have come back every couple of weeks just to hear the great information we're putting on actually just additional acknowledgment for NCSSE and their support over the last several months, as we've tried our hardest to think through what are the Lesson from the Field, a strategy that we can provide to our stakeholders as we all work together to improve the educational opportunities for students, and do so safely in person?

Again, my name is Christian Rhodes, I'm the Chief of Staff in the office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Department. On behalf of the Department, in particular, our Secretary of Education, I just want to thank you again, for joining.

We're really happy about the role that Lesson from the Field has played in the discussion as relates to safety reopening for in-person instruction. This Lesson from the Field is part of a larger effort that was started to order by executive order 14000 by President Biden. It speaks to the Best Practices Clearinghouse and many of you have submitted best practices, innovations, implementation stories, but it's our goal remains and will continue to remain to provide resources for our community, school educators, family, as we all work together to focus on in-person instruction and the needs of the students and our staff, as we know, many have been impacted by this pandemic.

Today, we're going to be hearing from some experts, and we're going to have a panel discussion later that really does a deeper dive. I just want to thank all those that submitted questions in the registration, in addition that we reached out to some of the national organizations of principals and superintendents to make sure that we were representative of the real concerns that are in the field.

I'm honored to have Neha Cramer, who's the lead on Schools Unit for Community Intervention and Critical Populations, and my colleague here at the Department, Jessica McKinney, who, after her will be discussing the role ED plays in ensuring we're complementing the work that the CDC does.

Our hope is that today, our audience has a clearer picture of the existing guidance and resources and you feel better equipped, ultimately, to reopen schools safely this fall, and to do as much as you can in your district to assist and accelerating learning, and ensuring that our students are well prepared. I want to acknowledge those who have been doing that the entire time. This is National Summer Learning Association Weekend. I just want to acknowledge the great summer programs and initiatives that have been going on across the country.

Our secretary is five visits, in five days, in five states, touring and discussing about the role that summer plays in the overall mission of in-person instruction. With that, I'll pass to my colleague, Neha Cramer and look forward to a discussion in a couple of minutes.

Neha Cramer:

All right. Thank you, Christian for that introduction. I'm happy to be here and happy to give an overview of our newly updated guidance for K through 12 schools. Here we just have a start disclaimer slide, and I just want to remind everyone that CDC guidance does not replace federal, state, local, territorial or tribal health and safety laws, rules and regulations with which schools must comply. As Christian and Tim noted, we received some questions from you all in the registration form and just want to thank you all and hopefully, my presentation today will hopefully answer many of those questions.

Today, I'm going to talk about some main takeaways from the updated guidance. The prevention strategies that we recommend, and a few additional considerations. Our updated guidance is intended to help administrators providers and local health officials select those appropriate layered prevention strategies and understand how to safely transition schools out of the COVID pandemic precautions as community transmission decreases or perhaps even stops.

It's of course the US government's priority to get students back to full, in-person learning safely. As we know, vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. But because schools might serve children under the age of 12, who are not yet eligible for vaccination or might have student population that are mixed vaccinated or unvaccinated, the guidance really emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies to protect people who are not fully vaccinated. I'll go over each strategy more in depth. I do want to point out that CDC still recommends that masks should be worn indoors by all individuals who are not fully vaccinated.

Schools play an important role in promoting equity, and learning and health, particularly for groups disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Equity considerations related to the K through 12 setting are a critical part of decision making and have been considered all throughout the updated guidance for schools. School administrators and public health officials can ensure safe and supportive environments by planning and using comprehensive prevention strategies for in-person learning and communicating those efforts.

Local public health officials working with schools should consider multiple factors when they make decisions about implementing prevention strategies. Since schools typically serve their surrounding communities, decisions should be based on the school population, families and children served, as well as their communities.

Why do schools still need to use prevention strategies? Well, the data shows that children can spread COVID-19 and do get sick, and not all students in this

upcoming school year will be eligible for the vaccination. We really want to protect students and staff who aren't fully vaccinated. Evidence from this previous school year showed that many K through 12 schools that were able to open safely had strictly implemented prevention strategies, such as mask use.

Okay, so here you'll see listed, the primary factors to consider when deciding about those prevention layers and prevention measures. The first is level of community transmission. As community transmission increases or decreases, you can add or decrease your prevention measures. COVID vaccination coverage in the community and among students and staff. The use of a frequent screening testing program in K through 12 schools for students and staff who are not fully vaccinated. Screening testing can particularly be helpful in areas with substantial to high community transmission levels. Monitoring any COVID-19 outbreaks in the school or in the community, and the ages of children served by K through 12 schools and those associated social and behavioral factors that might affect risk of transmission and the feasibility of different prevention strategies.

Here on this slide, you'll see the most critical strategies that you can use to protect those who are not fully vaccinated yet, especially in areas of moderate to high community transmission levels. The need for layering specific prevention strategies will vary by locality. For instance, localities might implement fewer COVID-19 prevention strategies based on community transmission levels, vaccination coverage and local policies and regulations.

Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among students aged 12 years and older, as well as teachers, staff and household members is one of the most critical strategies we have to help schools safely resume operations. Schools can help promote vaccination to families, teachers, eligible students, so on and so forth by providing information about the vaccination, encouraging vaccine trust in confidence, and establishing supportive policies and practices that make getting vaccinated as easy and convenient as possible.

When students and staff who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask, they protect themselves as well as others. Mask use among people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors, as well as in crowded settings especially when physical distancing can't be maintained. Generally, indoors we recommend that people who are not fully vaccinated continue to wear masks. Outdoors, people whether or not you're vaccinated or not, don't need to wear a mask outdoors anymore. But in areas, especially if you're in a community transmission area of substantial to high transmission, we do still recommend that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings, or during activities that might involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. So, concerts, festivals, so on and so forth.

Based on the needs of the community, school administrators may opt to make mask use universally required though, regardless of vaccination status in the

school. A few reasons for this could include having a student population that's not yet eligible for the vaccine. Those students in elementary school or even someone in middle school. If you're finding there's an increasing trend or high community transmission within the school or the surrounding community. Increasing transmission of a variant within your local community that might be spread more easily among children, or adolescents, or is resulting in more severe illness among children.

If a school is lacking a system to monitor the vaccine status of students, or teachers and staff, difficulty monitoring or enforcing mask policies that are not universal. If school administrators have awareness of low vaccine uptake within their school population, or within the community, or responding to community input that many teachers or staff or families and students don't want to participate in, in-person learning if mask use was not universal.

Those are just some examples of when administrators might opt to use universal masking policies. Schools where not everyone is fully vaccinated or not everyone is eligible yet to be vaccinated should implement physical distancing to the extent possible. But we don't want physical distancing to be a reason to stop full, in-person learning and to exclude children and adolescents from in-person learning in order to keep some sort of minimum distance requirement.

When it is feasible to implement physical distancing, we recommend maintaining at least three feet of physical distance within the classroom, combined with indoor masking by those who are not fully vaccinated. When it's not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least three feet, that's when it's especially important to layer those other prevention measures. So, indoor masking, things like cohorting, improving ventilation, regular cleaning, and even maybe screening testing to help reduce transmission risk.

For locations outside of the classroom setting, such as where staff might gather in the break rooms or cafeteria, so on and so forth, schools should implement, or continue implementing policies and practices that encourage that distancing of six feet between staff who are not fully vaccinated, especially in indoor settings.

I want to just touch briefly on cohorting. Cohorting can be used to limit the number of children and staff who come into contact with each other, especially when it's challenging to maintain physical distancing. The use of cohorting can limit the spread of COVID-19 between cohorts, but it should not replace other prevention measures within each group.

Screening testing in schools can help quickly identify and isolate those positive cases as well as quarantine those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or a positive case and are not fully vaccinated. Screening can also help to identify clusters to reduce the risk to in-person education. Ventilation, this remains one of the more critical prevention strategies we have for COVID-19, which helps to reduce the number of virus particles in the air. With ventilation, it's all about air

exchange and bringing that fresh air from the outside into the building or classroom, which will help from the virus concentrating inside.

Improving ventilation can be as simple as opening or cracking multiple doors and windows, and we can use child safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows. Or you can make changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems.

Hand washing and respiratory etiquette. We continue to recommend covering coughs and sneezes and washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and water aren't available to use hand sanitizer. This is a recommendation that goes beyond COVID-19, and we hope that everyone, including schools, continue to reinforce hand washing even well after COVID-19 ends.

Staying home when sick and getting tested. We know now that symptoms of COVID-19 can be symptoms of other things. We really, really want students, teachers, staff, families to stay home if you're showing any signs or symptoms of any infectious illness. Given that the symptoms could be various things outside of COVID-19, but could also be COVID-19, to go see your doctor or provider for recommendations on whether to get tested, and any other follow up care.

It's also essential for those who are not fully vaccinated to quarantine after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Schools should allow flexible and supportive sick leave policies and practices that encourage sick staff or teachers to stay home as well.

I do want to note that our guidance for those who are fully vaccinated and don't have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or get tested after an exposure to someone with COVID-19. Schools should educate staff and families when they and their children should stay home and when they can return to school.

The contact tracing and isolation and quarantine allows identifying which children and adolescents and staff with positive COVID-19 tests results should isolate and which close contacts should quarantine. Schools should continue collaborating with their state and local health departments to appropriately provide information about people diagnosed or exposed with COVID-19.

For cleaning, in general cleaning once a day is usually sufficient to remove any potential virus that may be on any surfaces. If a school or facility has had a sick person, or someone who's tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, then you should clean and disinfect that space. For more information on when and what to clean and disinfect, you can visit our website and those resources, they're online.

I wanted to touch on a few additional things. A lot of what we get questions are on food service and school meals. Given the very low risk that we now know of

transmission from surfaces and shared objects, there's no need to limit food service approaches to single use items or packaged meals or things like that. I think the main thing to remember is to really maximize that distancing as much as possible in those lines, when you're picking up food, especially since this is a time when masks won't be worn if you're eating, you really want to maximize that distancing, ideally to six feet when masks aren't being worn, especially if you're indoors.

Just to note that, of course those who are fully vaccinated don't need to distance while eating or in line so on and so forth. We do recommend to continue cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and of course to continue promoting hand washing before, during, after shifts or before and after eating, so on and so forth. If you're eating inside, to try to improve that ventilation, if you're eating inside or preparing food in the kitchen, so on and so forth. And to utilize those outdoor spaces as much as possible for mealtimes.

Sports and other extracurricular activities is another area that we get a lot of questions. People who are fully vaccinated do not need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting, including while participating in sports and extracurricular activities. When it comes to sports, due to, with certain sports, it can lead to increased breathing and exhalation. Some sports can put players, coaches and trainers who are not fully vaccinated at an increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19. Close contact sports and indoor sports are particularly risky, such as wrestling.

Similar risks for some extracurricular activities exists. So, band, choir, or school clubs that might meet indoors might be some of those riskier extracurricular activities.

When coaches or sports administrators, and so on so forth are thinking about sports related risks and activities, there are a few things they can consider. The setting of the sporting event or activities. Is it indoors or outdoors? Generally, if you can take those sports outdoors, that will decrease the risk of transmission. Physical closeness. The closer you are, like in wrestling or football, the higher the risk of spread. Number of people, of course, the more people you have, the risk increases. Level of intensity of activity. If the activity you're performing is causing you to breathe more than normal, then that risk increases and duration of time. The longer you're together, especially indoors, and this could include not only during the activity of the sport, but during meetings or meals or spend time in the locker room. The longer you're together, the risk of that spread increases.

Then the presence of people more likely to develop severe illness. People at increased risk of severe illness might need to take some extra precautions. Here you'll see some of our general resources that are related to youth and so on and so forth, and our children, and just some additional resources for administrators, parents and caregivers, as well as some resources for coping and resilience.

That concludes my presentation. Thank you.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you so much, and thank you for just the way you were able to break down that information, I think it's critically important when the CDC and other agencies drop information into the public sphere, it's always great to have these opportunities to make it a little bit more real for those practitioners those stakeholders who are in the field, in the classrooms and school buildings and community centers, campsites, daily working. Thank you so much for the information.

I think it's critically important that, as the department, we think about ways to best translate that, the CDC's guidance into practical elements that we know are happening in schools and administrators, superintendents, state officials are thinking about daily educators. I'm really happy to have one of the secret weapons of the Department of Education, with Jessica McKinney from the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development.

She has really, really wealth of knowledge, has a lot of great practical implications. You can often see her influence in many of the documents and guidance that we provided at the department. With that, I'll pass to my colleague, Jessica.

Jessica McKinney: Thank you so much. Really appreciate the opportunity. As Christian mentioned, we so appreciate the opportunity to share directly and especially in direct partnership with CDC colleagues. They have provided a really excellent, step-by-step overview of the recent updates to CDC guidance and please know we are in the process of aligning existing ED resources, including the ED COVID-19 handbook.

From the Department of Education, we want to just emphasize a few key points as we consider reopening for the fall. The first one is around collaborative family and community engagement. This is truly an essential step. I know so many of you have been engaged in this important work throughout the pandemic, and as you are preparing to open schools.

There are so many ways to do this. It's really critical to make sure families and communities are engaged very early in the process, so that they have a direct impact on the decisions that you make. To make sure you're able to reach families with many perspectives, school leaders can offer multiple ways to engage such as town halls or visits to school buildings. As you're planning those events, consider a variety of schedules and transportation needs. You might also consider using surveys, and be sure to offer surveys in multiple inclusive ways. Not just online, although online could be helpful, potentially also via phone or text or other methods.

Then one-on-one, and small group outreach can also be so powerful to really hear what the concerns are and figure out solutions together. We also just want

to keep in mind the importance of using a trauma informed approach, knowing what the impact of COVID-19 has been on so many of our community members. We know some have lost loved ones, face economic insecurity or experience anxiety from social isolation and uncertainty. There are resources from SAMHSA or the US Department of Education's comprehensive centers on using trauma informed approaches.

As you engage families, partnering with community based organizations can also help. Schools and CBOs can identify and work to address the concerns that parents raise. Throughout all of these engagement approaches, make sure that you are hosting inclusive engagement, make sure that you offer access for English learners and students and adults with disabilities.

I realize Neha covered the importance of vaccination. But we, of course, just want to really underscore that key point. Vaccination is a critical strategy in recovering and ending this pandemic. Schools have options of ways that they can really support this effort. Serving as a vaccination site, offering vaccines directly in your school buildings, whether to students or to families, consistent with all applicable consent and privacy.

Also, providing information about other vaccination locations that are near the school. You can also respond to questions and concerns from families about vaccination, such as through information questions. CDC, as Neha mentioned, has resources that can help with that work. Neha also mentioned this, but let's just underscore the importance of offering supportive sick leave options so that employees can get vaccinated or stay home if they do have side effects after vaccination.

The third thing we want to touch on is education and public health collaboration. This is something that we really value. For example, through today's webinar. But we are directly engaged with CDC and other partners at the federal level in an ongoing manner. We know so many of you have been working very collaboratively at the state and local levels and just want to re-emphasize the importance of that cross sector collaboration, particularly as you establish routines around vaccination, screening, testing, contact tracing and other prevention strategies and communication.

One possible approach could be considering whether there are ways to assign staff across agencies, or to offer experiences across sectors for emerging professionals coming into education or into public health.

Finally, we want to emphasize supporting all students throughout the process of returning to learning. We can make sure that our communications are available to families and students in all of the languages and formats that they need to fully understand and to come back into school.

We also encourage avoiding punitive approaches. That could be, for example, if a student who needs to wear a mask does not have one, avoiding disciplinary actions and instead simply providing extra masks for those students. We also want to keep in mind ensuring that students are able to re-engage in learning without any negative consequences for times they might have missed.

Where masking is needed, because people are not fully vaccinated, consider using masks with clear panels, where possible, because this is really supportive for emerging readers, for English learners, students with speech disabilities and many others. Those are the types of masks that still fit snugly to the face, but if you have a clear portion of the mask, they are distinct from face shields, and CDC has very helpful information generally on masking and particularly on this type of mask.

Finally, we encourage school leaders to consider using behavioral techniques like those found on the Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports websites that can help students adjust to changes and routines. There will be new routines in many contexts, and all students can benefit from such positive and supportive approaches. Staff may also need time to plan for using new methods.

We really appreciate all of the work that we know is ongoing. We know many of you are already implementing all of these things. We stand ready to hear about your successes and to continue to support you and address questions that you may have. That I'll turn it back over to Christian.

Christian Rhodes:

Thank you, Jessica, and thanks for the work that you and I know the entire team is doing as we think of ways to ensure that our stakeholders have the information they need. I just want to double click on the point about ensuring that the communication that states and districts utilize to communicate with their family, their stakeholders. That in language forms the means in which the community can understand.

Special shout out to the Lesson from the Field we had at Baltimore City, Maryland a couple of weeks ago, Well, a couple of months ago now to talk about, the role of community and family engagement in the efforts. We know that as districts and states come back this fall, it's going to be extremely important. Thank you.

Now we're going to turn to a panel discussion. I just want to say, this discussion is truly informed by the questions that were submitted through the registration. A special thanks to our partners across educational stakeholder spectrum, we reached out to proactively to say "Listen, give us some sense of what the field is saying, how can we best support their needs?"

I want to first turn to the CDC and ask some of those questions that I think is clear on people's mind. One is really related to, how can we be sure that in-

person education is safe? Particularly with the increased circulation of the Delta barrier? Neha?

Neha Cramer:

Great question. Christian, I know that that's probably the biggest thing right now on everyone's mind. With the Delta variant, right now, with it being a recent variant, we have limited data right now on the transmission of this variant in the school setting. But there's nothing so far to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine, or any of our recommended prevention strategies are ineffective against the Delta variant.

Our guidance is really written to be flexible. As schools, local situation changes, they can utilize the guidance to figure out which prevention measures to add or keep on, or even decrease if maybe transmission decreases in their local community.

As community transmission increases, though, and if the variant continues to increase in community transmission in some areas, no administrators should be prepared, and plan for potential outbreaks in schools, especially if they're not utilizing a lot of prevention measures to really be prepared for any outbreaks. But by following all of our layered prevention strategies outlined in the guidance, schools can minimize that spread of COVID-19 within their school community.

Christian Rhodes:

Great. What I hear you say is there's the need for vigilance, but not necessarily panic. I think that's critically important given what we know, is just the evolving nature of COVID-19 and the different variants out there. Thank you so much for that. I know it's a critical question, I saw in some of the chat, in some of the questions and clearly there personally and professionally.

Just going on some of the slides that you had earlier, are there scenarios where students may not need to wear a mask?

Neha Cramer:

Yes. Again, in general people whether or not you're vaccinated or not, you don't need to wear a mask outdoors. Again, if the community transmission is substantial or high, then we would recommend that those who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask, if you're in a crowded setting, like a concert or festival or if you're you're doing something that might involve sustained close contact.

But CDC does continue to recommend that students, teachers and staff who are not fully vaccinated to continue wearing masks indoors, which is consistent with overall recommendations for fully vaccinated people. Again, since schools, they're going to be serving a population or many children that are not yet eligible for the vaccination, the updated guidance really emphasizes those prevention strategies most critical, and most important for in-person learning, such as mask wearing in schools, among those who are not fully vaccinated.

Christian Rhodes: What I was going to say is that, just I have a couple of additional questions for you, Neha and then I'll turn to Jessica. I know an area that's top of mind for a number of administrators and districts is transportation, and whether or not children have to wear masks on school buses. Any thoughts there?

Neha Cramer: Yeah, good question. I think I had it on my slide, but I didn't actually say anything about it. I assume you're talking about school buses and things like that. The current CDC order that requires the wearing of masks by people on public transportation, and transportation hubs still applies to all public transportation, including school buses, whether or not you're vaccinated.

Your bus drivers, students, and whoever's loading up on that bus, regardless of vaccination status, do still need to wear a mask.

Christian Rhodes: Great. Thank you. I think one last question to you and I have towards Jessica is, what participation levels are needed in a screening testing program by staff and/or students to make it effective?

Neha Cramer: With screening testing, first, it should be offered to staff and students who have not been fully vaccinated. When the community transmission is at moderate, substantial or high levels within the community. But to be effective, the screening testing program should test at least once per week, and the school should be able to rapidly report those results, ideally, within 24 hours.

Schools can consider different testing strategies or multiples testing strategies, for example, testing, a random sample of at least 10% of students who are not fully vaccinated, or even conducting pool testing of cohorts.

Christian Rhodes: Great, thank you. Jessica, as we talked about earlier, as educators have particular questions and concerns related to COVID-19. We think about how to translate... The science says the practice in the school house. We did reach out to some of our partners, stakeholders, the National Secondary School Association, Elementary School Association, Principals Association, AASAR, Superintendents Association, just to get some sense from them, what are some of the key questions?

One that came up, I'd love to get your feedback or input on, that the new guidance recommends that fully vaccinated educators and students no longer have to wear masks. But what recommendations would you give to a school leader in an area where there's low vaccination rates, or the governors have permitted mask mandates? Neha. You obviously can lead into that questions as well, give us some of the particulars in that.

Jessica McKinney: Sure, of course, I'm happy to start and definitely welcome Neha to jump in. What I think is really helpful is the way that the CDC outlines the prevention strategies as being layered and that folks should use as many layers as feasible in their context. Certainly, one of the key considerations in establishing the plan

would be that vaccination coverage and if it is lower than it would be more important to try to use as many of the other strategies as possible.

Even if you're not able to require masking, encouraging it, offering masks, making sure they're available can be helpful, as can using additional physical distancing. Of course, wanting to not make that a barrier, but that might be a context in which it's important to consider all of your available safe spaces, inside and outside of school buildings, if you do have lower vaccination rates, and you're not able to require masking.

All of the other approaches that Neha walked through are also applicable here. Are there changes you can make to your ventilation systems? Are you able to bring in some HEPA filters, open windows and doors where that's feasible and safe. Just continuing with, of course, the hand washing, respiratory etiquette.

That might be a particular confluence of circumstances where a screening testing program is more important and more helpful. There's a very helpful website called whentotest.org that an NIH grantee developed, and that can help folks know the parameters, the frequency of testing that might be most useful, given their specific circumstances. But, of course, would welcome anything else that Neha would add.

Neha Cramer: No, I think, Jessica, you hit everything. You touched on this too, just to reduce that stigma especially around mask use. If you can require, as she said, to try to encourage it, offer them and make it as supportive to whether or not you're vaccinated as possible.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you for that. A question that came in from our Superintendents Association, and I think that would echo to a couple of the other pieces that we got from registrants is, as schools work to safely reopen in person for the fall, is it reasonable to anticipate... It is reasonable, I think it's fair to say that communities are going to have some hesitation, particularly those that had some of the greatest or highest concerns related to COVID, higher rates, and lower vaccination rate, higher rates of COVID, and the lower vaccination rates in their community. This is really a perfect storm. Can we just talk a little bit about what part of the guidance should superintendents and districts look to lean on in addressing that sense of imbalance of a community that has hesitation for a host of reasons?

I would love to get, Jessica, your thoughts on that, and then, Neha, some of your thoughts. I heard some answers already, but I think it might be worth double clicking for those who are on.

Jessica McKinney: Absolutely. I think this goes back to the importance of early family and community engagement. Really understanding what the specific concerns are of the community and using those to inform the planning that is ongoing. As I mentioned, I think just getting a diverse set of perspectives from families in your

communities is very important to know all of the range of questions that they might have.

As Neha's emphasized, there are strategies that have been the subject of a good deal of the recent research. Certainly, vaccination and masking are key among those. Physical distancing to the extent possible and CDC had some really helpful research on that earlier this year around, being able to use three feet as opposed to six feet within schools, particularly where students are also wearing masks.

Cohorting could be something to consider if you're not able to do other approaches, and that can connect directly with the way you think about screening testing. If you are able to reduce the number of people that are interacting on a regular basis, it's easier to do screening testing, or to do testing following a positive COVID-19 test of just those people that have been in the same cohort. But it really does require a community effort. The staying home when sick piece is so important, and I think it's important to reinforce our collective opportunity to support each other in continuing to have all of the opportunities that we all want.

I know there are sometimes are hesitations to participate in some of these approaches, but really keeping the focus on the fact that it is screening testing to keep schools open as much as possible and to keep activities ongoing, to the greatest extent possible. Now, I'll pause and pass to Neha.

Neha Cramer: Yeah, I think Jessica summed it up pretty nicely there. The other thing, she brought up cohorting, and I just want to point out that contact tracing and things like that would be much easier. If you can't do everything else, but you implement cohorting, then that makes contact tracing easier on the school and public health officials.

Christian Rhodes: I think both of you. I looked at the time, and I was engulfed in it and I know that we only have a couple more minutes. Tim will get on me if I don't probably pass it back. But I just want to acknowledge that we noted a number of questions that are into the chat. I've been watching as the team has been trying to respond to them.

Our goal is to continue to provide space for the candid conversation and really explore what we're hearing from the fields so we can be responsive. I just want to thank Neha and Jessica for your time and your expertise. I know the many long nights and hours... I'm on a couple of those calls, so I know how much you all are putting into this. But we really do appreciate it. With that, I will turn it back to Tim.

Tim Duffy: Thank you, Christian. Appreciate the good information shared by everyone today. Excellent discussion about many really critical topics for addressing the return to school this fall. We do have a few minutes remaining, there's a couple

of items we want to close out with you on. The first is one final opportunity to get some information from all of you that have joined us today, it's through this poll.

We'd like to know... Thanks, Claire, for posting that active poll now. Just select the radio button from the items here that are of particular interest to you participating today, where you feel you could use additional information, you can select more than one item on this list.

We know that time is limited on these webinars and that there's so much information that may still be needed to help you with returning to school. We're curious, for those of you who've taken the time to join us today to let us know where you feel, in particular, you could use additional support in receiving information, and that could inform some of the directions that we might take in the months to come here as we approach the beginning of the next school year.

Just going to allow a few more seconds. If you haven't yet weighed in on this, I encourage you to do that. In the interest of time, we'll move on here now. Claire will show us the results of that poll before we continue. The odds on favorite there was the issue of mental health support for students, faculty and staff. This has been a rough year and a half plus, for everyone. That makes total sense that, that would be a high priority issue.

Next in line comes the re-engaging students. Obviously, a high issue for all of us. We'll maintain this information. This will help us inform directions and content that we might address. In fact, it's a great opportunity for us to look at the next slide in which I'm really happy to report to you all, if you're not yet aware of it that, we are continuing this Lesson from the Field series throughout the remainder of the summer.

Some of the topics we just raised, in fact, are identified here. As you see, we're planning five additional webinars during the remainder of the summer, as a part of this series to support all of you, as you prepare for the return to school for the 2021/'22 school year.

Later this month, we'll be, on July 28th, discussing how to buoy up the most critical supports for our students in schools, which are the staff and educators present there. That will be the July topic later this month on the 28th. IN August, then, we have a two part series, which was this... The July one really is in part addresses the number one need you just identified. The August one, both of them address the second highest ranking need you mentioned, which is re-engaging students.

These two events scheduled for August 11th and 25th include a focus on supporting special student populations. There will be a fair amount of information provided in those two sessions about that re-engagement process.

Then in September, we have two key topics that we will round out this series with. The first is early childhood, and the return to deeper engagement with early childhood space with young people as we return. Then September 22nd, nutrition and wellness. We welcome your input about specifics you might be looking for as we move toward those events. Your question might be how can you get us that information? That's precisely what we invite you to consider on this next slide.

One of the ways you can give us information about the specifics of where to focus content and energy in those remaining five sessions is by virtue of the feedback form that we're inviting you to take a look at right now. It will ask you to provide some feedback about today's session in particular, and also will provide you the chance to provide feedback about what information you might find particularly helpful in those remaining five sessions.

You'll see a view on the left side of the screen of what that looks like, and on the right there's a link as well as within the chat being posted, is a link to that survey as well. It does take just a couple of minutes to complete it. So, please, do take a few minutes to help us with that information.

In closing, my thanks to Christian, Neha and Jessica for the excellent information you've shared today. We also want to thank all of you, some 700 strong for your engagement and participation today. We will leave Zoom platform open for at least five more minutes so that you have additional time to post any additional questions you might have, and to complete that feedback form survey to help us get your feedback for the event today.

Again, we greatly appreciate your time. Thank you for all you do to provide the support to students and to provide them with a safe, supportive learning environment. I hope to see you on July 28 for our next webinar. Have a great rest of your afternoon.