



Return to Learn



POE Recommendations for Opening Schools

July 20, 2020



POE Recommendations for Opening Schools:

As the debate over when and how schools should reopen evolves amid changing and uncertain circumstances, a few things are clear: the health and safety of all students and school personnel is paramount; any decision regarding the reopening of schools (virtually or in-person) is a decision that should be made at the local level with careful consideration of input from health experts, local leaders, and school personnel. Clear communication and close working relationships with local teachers, support staff, and administrators will facilitate the necessary flexibility that every school district and community needs in determining how to safely and efficiently reopen schools.

We understand that during this historic pandemic, teachers are being asked to adjust to a new reality that is imbedded with risk. We also understand that each community is unique and faces its own particular challenges in responding to the pandemic. As such, the level risk faced by each community is distinct and affected by different variables. Therefore, a local decision on when and how to reopen schools will be in the best interest of each community. POE's recommendations reflect the concerns of our members and create an opportunity for local and state leaders to develop policies that address these serious and complicated issues.

Health & Safety Recommendations:

- Postpone in-person opening of schools if substantial spread of COVID-19 is present in the community as determined by the school administration, school employees, the local community and health officials.
- Schedule staff time in schools before students return for safety training and professional learning to prepare for instructional methods to accommodate the various models that your school district has proposed.
- Ensure parents and students are fully familiar with district instructional models and expectations for adherence to safety protocols for in-person and virtual instruction.
- Adopt district and site safety plans and directly communicate these plans to staff before they report for the first day of on-site work. Safety plans should be clear and comprehensive on the procedures that will keep staff and students safe, including how positive cases of COVID-19 will be handled. Safety plans should continue to evolve according to national, state and local guidelines as well as staff input and the experience of educators.
- Emphasize accommodations for staff with underlying health conditions and dependent care issues. Establish clear guidelines on such accommodations, including possible options for virtual instruction assignments as well as clearly articulated leave policies and interpretation of federal and state leave laws for employees, including the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.



Health & Safety Recommendations (continued):

- Limit increased duties that come from both in-person and virtual learning by not assigning course loads to teachers that require them to perform double duty.
- Allow virtual-only teachers who can accomplish their work remotely, outside of the school setting, to do so in order to limit their exposure to others, especially when the assignment in question is meant to accommodate a high-risk condition. School districts and school boards should look to their own local teaching staff to fulfill all virtual teaching roles and not to outside private firms.
- Provide ongoing communication and transparency about all decisions affecting staff and student health and safety, including opportunities for professional dialogue with staff about any concerns or issues.

Preparedness Recommendations:

Beyond virus-related health risks, the concern most often shared by educators with POE is that their schools and districts are not adequately keeping them informed about school opening plans or providing evidence that their concerns are being considered and incorporated into opening plans. Many educators do not yet feel confident that they will be provided with the necessary training and resources to safely return to on-site instruction or be prepared for virtual options.

Educators must feel confident that:

- They clearly understand and have input into the district's plans before reporting to work;
- These plans will continue to be refined and communicated to all stakeholders once staff are in the building and have time to learn, practice, and revise safety plan protocols;
- Students will not return to the classroom before understanding the required health and safety protocols and expected behaviors.

The safety of all students and school personnel must be the number one priority as we near the beginning of school. Difficult decisions will have to be made, but our focus must not waver from protecting our students and teachers. The decisions we make today will have profound and lasting consequences.

Important links:

- POE COVID-19 FAQs:
[https://www.professionalklahomaeducators.org/files/COVID-19%20FAQs\(1\).pdf](https://www.professionalklahomaeducators.org/files/COVID-19%20FAQs(1).pdf)
- Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>