

The State Board of Education met in an emergency called session this afternoon to provide additional clarity and guidance on changes made Tuesday by the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) to the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12). The updated state guidance from both agencies comes in response to NC's COVID metrics continuing to improve and the [CDC releasing updated guidance](#) that further clarifies best practices for operating public schools during the pandemic. Governor Roy Cooper and NCDHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen mentioned the school guidance changes in conjunction with releasing new [Executive Order 204](#) that further eases state restrictions on businesses and gatherings and will be in effect from 5 p.m. Friday March 26 through April 30. Regarding school gatherings, NCDHHS and the Department of Public Instruction today issued [interim guidance for school special events and graduation ceremonies](#).

Earlier in the week, the following key updates were made to the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#):

- All grade levels should operate in Plan A.
- Recommendations were added to the requirements for Social Distancing and minimizing Exposure in alignment with updated CDC guidance around three feet of social distancing for elementary school students, cohorting and three feet for middle school students, and continuing six feet of distance between adults and between adults and children.
- Symptom screenings at school entry are no longer required but are recommended – this includes temperature checks. However, close contact disclosure and positive test disclosure are still required.
- Recommendations were added and clarified around incorporating screening testing and diagnostic testing in K-12 settings.
- Playground structures are no longer required to receive regular disinfection.
- Recommendation was added to indicate that individuals who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic do not need to quarantine if they are identified as close contacts.
- Changed wording from “social” to “physical” distancing.
- Eliminated the recommendation for physical barriers.

The State Board of Education today approved the state’s \$500,000 contract with the ABC Science Collaborative of the Duke School of Medicine to collect and analyze COVID-19 data in participating LEAs providing in-person instruction under Plan A for middle and high school students. This contact was called for in enacted [Senate Bill 220](#) on reopening schools. The board also made [corresponding changes to the “Lighting Our Way Forward” guidance](#) for schools with the following key changes to match this week’s updates to the NCDHHS toolkit and CDC guidance on physical distancing:

- Made the school operations guidance applicable to all public school units, including charter schools previously excluded from [Senate Bill 220](#), which allowed LEAs to move Grades 6-12 to in-person instruction under Plan A with minimal physical distancing.
- Noted that “Plan C” for full remote learning is no longer an option for daily instruction.

- Clarified that school districts retain the ability to close individual schools or classrooms to address health and safety concerns and may use remote instruction for students affected by those closures.

Also today, NCDHHS revised the documents listed and linked below, particularly to ensure clarity around the following information:

- **Updated Recommendations for Plan A**

Physical distancing is recommended under Plan A at a minimum of three feet and whenever feasible between students, and at a minimum of six feet between adults. There is no required minimum physical distancing under Plan A. Under Plan A, required mitigation strategies are even more critical: wearing cloth face coverings, keeping hands washed and surfaces clean, and the recommended emphasis on cohorting students and teachers into groups that will not intermix. Physical distancing of six feet at all times is still required under Plan B.

- **Daily Symptom Screenings**

NC DHHS is aligning with the CDC that does not currently recommend schools conduct daily symptom screening for students. However, parents, caregivers, or guardians (“caregivers”) are strongly encouraged to monitor their children for symptoms of infectious illness every day through home-based symptom screening. Students who are sick should not attend school in-person. The CDC still recommends considering screening for employees. Adults are more likely to have symptoms with COVID-19 than students and are more likely to spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to others. Data from studies in school settings show that viral transmission is more likely adult to adult or adult to child than child to child or child to adult.

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