

Follow Up Questions from COVID Disparities Task Force Meeting: Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs



1. Will someone educate the teachers and parents on the signs of COVID-19 in kids?

School districts in collaboration with DHHR or their local health department are encouraged to provide information on the signs of COVID-19. Superintendent Burch has weekly meetings with the 55 county superintendents, and there is also a weekly meeting with chief instructional leaders and member of the executive staff. Resources have been provided through the School Re-entry Toolkit that also outline local and national resources to educate administrators, faculty and staff about the disease. The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) sent 25,000 posters out to schools about signs of COVID and best health practices.

2. Will teachers get an aid in the classroom to maintain social distancing and mask wearing?

Staffing decisions are at the discretion of individual school systems.

3. What services will be in place for a kid with special needs and sensory disorders who can't wear a mask?

Guidance is available in our West Virginia Re-entry Toolkit on the WVDE website regarding masks. It clarifies that any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield. Additional guidance regarding special education students is forthcoming.

4. Will therapists be allowed in the school? What kind of COVID19 screening will be in place for them?

School therapy services will continue in the school setting this year. Appropriate protocols will be in place so those services may be delivered in the safest possible manner.

5. How will you deal with replacing teachers who get sick given we don't have a lot of them.

The shortage of certified teachers has been a challenge West Virginia has experienced for many years, and this year will be no different. As they have in the past, districts will have to utilize substitute teachers in situations where an employee becomes ill.

6. How will the Department of Education allow a safe space for black students? Will you consider a moratorium on suspensions and expulsions? What is the percentage of black students of in school suspensions, suspensions, and expulsions?

The WVDE Division of Teaching and Learning is sponsoring virtual training to assist educators to prepare for re-entry. This will be a school year like none other. A substantial part of this training is on social-emotional wellness and the impact trauma will have on re-entry efforts. While discipline decisions are at the discretion of the school and county administrators, the districts are aware that schools must be as prepared as possible to build time into their plans to address the increased social-emotional needs of all students.

Additionally, West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) President Miller Hall and Superintendent Burch understand the need to address disciplinary disparities in our school system and look forward to working with Executive Director Upson in the near future.

7. For the working parents, what number of positive cases will be the cutoff to close a school?

The Governor, relying on information and advice of medical professionals, will make the determination to close a school. This decision will be heavily based on data collected and analyzed by the WVDHHR and state health leaders.

8. Will DHHR have any funding for in home sitters as these children will not be allowed to go to daycare if there's a probable case? This will be a great financial burden.

The West Virginia Department of Education is unaware of any funding available for home sitters. The WVDHHR would need to be consulted to determine if any resources are available to assist with childcare situations.

9. How are partners for reopening being engaged? I know some didn't even know they were on that list when it came out. And why isn't the NAACP and this task force not part of this partner list?

The West Virginia Board Education and county superintendents joined the West Virginia Department of Education and more than 40 national and state agencies and organizations to serve as partners in developing the re-entry and recovery plans for West Virginia. These partners continue to provide insight, research support and expertise as the pandemic evolves in the state. The fluid nature of the virus and its impact on our schools and communities require the council of partners to remain engaged moving forward to support counties with guidance. The West Virginia Department of Education will include Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs Executive Director Upson as one of our state partners. We look forward to her participation and contribution on any future state partners engagement opportunities as we continue to refine our re-entry plan.

10. Special education educators and personnel are scarce. The vacant positions in the education system are growing daily. How will the minutes and services of IEPs and 504s be modified? How will the students, faculty, and staff be protected as these students are pulled multiple times during a day?

Additional guidance regarding special education students is forthcoming.

11. What responsibility will the school system have with assisting with contact tracing especially in the special education population?

School systems will be expected to follow the direction and instructions provided to them by their local health department and the WVDHHR with respect to contact tracing.

12. Can school districts in collaboration with DHHR provide training to teachers and parents on signs of COVID19 in children?

School districts in collaboration with DHHR or their local health department may provide information on the signs of COVID-19. Information is also available at the WVDE, WVDHHR, and CDC websites.

13. Will the teachers get an aid in the classroom to manage social distancing and cleaning and mask wearing for sensory disorder children?

Staffing decisions are at the discretion of individual counties.

14. It has been requested that the taskforce be included as a community partner with the state board of education for the plan.

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