Reopening Schools: Guidance for the COVID-19 Classroom

Aries is North America's premiere provider of modular buildings offering quick builds, delivery, and financing of temporary or permanent classrooms for K-12 Schools and Universities.

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Reopening the Physical Classroom

The unpresented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to inflict disruptions across many sectors of society and the education system within the United States is no exception. Within the U.S., statewide school closures started as early as March 16, 2020, and lasted through March 25 when the last of the nation's schools were closed to in-person classes. These closures affected approximately 55.1 million students across 124,000 public and private schools. Most schools were recommended or ordered to remain closed through the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

These closures resulted in the forced adoption of e-learning and distance learning. The move to distance learning on such a grand scale had not been previously attempted and in many ways has proven to be problematic at best.

Despite the tremendous opportunity that distance learning provides, one of the most pressing issues stemmed from student's access to technology that enabled them to actually receive curriculum. Another large scale issue was the number of educators who had simply not been trained in this teaching method, and curriculum had not been developed. Each of these factors has had a particularly negative effect students, especially those who are under-privileged, students learning English as a second language, and students with special needs.

As public and private schools plan to reopen this Fall, educators are working tirelessly to implement necessary safety measures and execute notable operational changes in an effort to cope with COVID-19. Ultimately the decision to reopen it is up to state and local officials, but as some schools are scheduled to start at the end of August or first part of September the return to the classroom will be far from normal.

This guide is intended to assist educators with solutions and designs that aid in the reopening of schools safely and effectively. The information herein is meant to be guidelines and not mandates, and are meant to complement state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which schools must comply. No information herein is intended to conflict with such regulations.

Educators are implementing safety measures, adopting technology, and facilitating operational change in order to reopen classrooms and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Photo Credit: GCIS

Supporting Teachers and Learning

Since late March, nearly all students in the U.S. have missed in-person instruction due to the pandemic. With all the seen and unseen effects of COVID-19 especially within the education sector, teachers will certainly have their work cut out for them as their students return to class this Fall.

Not only will teachers need to follow the health and safety guidelines, but they will likely be challenged by a large number of students who have fallen behind academically. According to UNESCO, even short-term interruptions of formal education for kindergarten students typically results in a 67% loss of literacy.

Student's learning across all grade levels and backgrounds may be substantially behind. According to the Brookings Institution, the preliminary "COVID Slide" (learning loss) estimates suggest students could begin Fall 2020 with only 70% of the learning gains in reading from the prior year relative to a typical school year. In mathematics, students may show even smaller learning gains from the previous year, returning with less than 50% of the gains. Students who are in lower grades, may end up being almost a full year behind.

This year students are highly likely to return to school with more variability in their academic skills sets than under normal circumstances. As such, a portion of the beginning of the school year will more than likely need to be devoted to recouping these learning losses.

According to Education Week, only 29% of school districts are planning to reopen full in-person classes this Fall, while another 18% remain undecided. The reliance on distance learning either in either a hybrid model, or a total distance mode, is 53%. While strides have been made with distance learning, we have already demonstrated the detrimental effects that prolonged lack of in-person learning can have on students.

With an ongoing need for social distancing our schools simply do not have enough physical space to accommodate all students. In-person classes may allow for only a 25-36% occupancy rate based on existing classrooms. In turn, this means that 64-75% or approximately 35.2-41.3 million students will be simply left behind as they find themselves outside the classroom and away from the benefits of in-person learning.

School District Reopening Plans Fall 2020	
Full In-Person All Students	29%
Hybrid/Partial	13%
Remote Learning Only	40%
Undecided	18%
Total:	100%

School district's reopening plans and delivery of curriculum in the United States for Fall 2020.

Source: Education Week
US–based School Districts n=313

Promoting Safety and Prevention

Our education system was built for social interaction, not social distancing. There are numerous considerations on how best to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of teachers, staff, families, and communities, while preparing to educate students this fall. When it comes to safety measures in the classroom, there are some obvious and not-so obvious solutions on how to mitigate the spread of Covid-19.

"Recognizing the importance of providing safe, in-person learning, communities may also wish to help schools by examining whether additional public or private space, including outdoor spaces, that is currently underutilized might be safely repurposed for school and instructional purposes." ~ CDC

By encouraging everyone within the community and schools to practice preventive measures will support schools' safe reopening and will also support them to remain open. Following current CDC guidelines, it is clear that the spread of the virus can be mitigated by wearing cloth face coverings, maintaining proper hygiene by washing hands, cleaning surfaces, and by social distancing.

For schools, there are more subtle safety measures that should be enacted. These measures may include such things as cohorting, or the grouping of students within smaller classes. Cohorting has sometimes been referred to as grouping students into pods. For the time being schools should avoid large gatherings, such as crowded sporting events, or students in the cafeteria. Even keeping the common areas such as hallways clear between classes may help to alleviate risks of community spread.

Even less obvious ways of prevention may include the implementation of individual temperature checks, or technology that enables automated temperature checks of larger groups. The installation of touchless automatic doors can prevent unnecessary contact with surfaces. While the use of sanitizers for cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces may be commonly known, the installation of commercial UV disinfectant lighting that can be turned on for timed-periods and disinfect entire rooms may not. Other technologies to consider might include the use of HEPA air purifiers and ensuring ventilation systems operate properly. Proper training on the safe use of these technologies and even such things as cleaning supplies will also be critical.

To help mitigate risk of spread schools should offer small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students and their teachers should stay together throughout the entire day. In classrooms, students should remain at least 6 feet apart and not share objects.

Image Credit: CESAR MANSO/Getty Images

Managing Transitions

Teachers can start the year off right by evaluating all their repetitive routines that interrupt learning and develop procedures in order to make those task run more smoothly. Most educators realize that the creation of efficient transitions make for smoother running classrooms. Transitions, are essentially anytime students are directed to change from one activity to another within a learning environment.

Transitions may be designed for individual students, or for groups. They can be small and relatively simple, or they can be large and complex dependent on how significant the change. Ordinary activities such as arrival to the classroom and students taking an assigned seat, restroom breaks, moving between subjects, or more complex such as teachers gathering the entire class and proceeding to lunch, are each transitions that can present an opportunity for undesirable student behavior, or loss of control.

Teachers and their students are faced with numerous transitions throughout any given school day. An educator's ability to effectively manage these transitions is an important aspect of classroom management. By establishing rules and procedures which are teachable and repeatable can minimize a interruptions to student's learning. Alternatively, ineffective management can waste an enormous amount of learning time, and poorly managed transitions can easily become a frustration to teachers without proper strategies in place.

> *"If a teacher increases instructional time by just fifteen minutes a day through the use of more efficient routines and procedures, students in that classroom would gain forty-five hours of instructional time per year"* ~ T. Stacho, Ed.S.

When well-planned transition procedures are in place, and students are trained to follow them, a teacher's work can be significantly minimized. The successful implementation of these procedures will often cause students to become better behaved, as they are not sitting idle, or kept waiting.

Beyond the ordinary transitions commonly implemented each school year, this year due to COVID-19, educators will need to address safety concerns regarding mitigation and prevention of spread. Due to the complexities of the virus, the return to school will be significantly different, and as such, coordinating and planning transitions has never been more important. Ensuring appropriate student behavior during transitions especially those that are related to preventing the spread and mitigation are critical for the safety of students, faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and the community as a whole.

Prior to the beginning of school, administrators should work closely with teachers and parents in order to both train and help implement safety procedures. There should be clear communications regarding protocols as they deal with not only the standard back to school issues, but procedures that address the virus and other health concerns.

Pre-Class Arrival, Arrival, and Late Arrival

As students head back to classroom, administrators are tasked with development, implementation, and communication of strategies that ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of students, teachers, school staff, parents, and the communities they serve. Similar to the application of effective transitions make for smother classrooms, these strategies should make for a smother operating schools.

With the need for adapting to Covid-19, a school day's transitions will start at the student's home, or pre-class arrival. During this period both students and parents will gather any necessary personal supplies along with any protective gear such as personal sanitizer, face masks, or face shields. It will also be important for parents to take their child's temperature prior to leaving for school. If they have symptoms or are running a fever parents should inform the school and stay home.

As part of their pre-class preparation students should be instructed on how to social distance while waiting for or boarding transportation. Students and parents should receive policy changes regarding what school bus operators have put in place such as far as staggered pickup times and arrival times. There may be a need for increased ventilation, and of course social distancing while being transported.

Specific policies should be created beyond the usual pre-class arrival instructions and communicated to students in efforts to educate them on the importance of social distancing upon arrival and how to enter the building. For the millions of children who depend on schools for their meals they and their parents should be informed as to how the cafeteria will operate. Personal protection equipment or PPE may need to be provided to some students prior to their arrival to school.

Upon entry, staff, or other monitored equipment, should perform temperature checks and symptom screenings at each entrance. Prior to students arrival, teachers and staff should evaluate the building for obvious safety issues like heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. In classrooms they should conduct thorough inspections of levels and availability of hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies, and other equipment necessary to safely operate the classroom. Inspect the room and make sure to modify or adjust seats, furniture, and workstations that enable social distancing. Inspect any transparent shields or other physical barriers, and test other equipment in order to ensure proper operation.

In order to help with social distancing students may be assigned staggered arrival times. These staggered arrival times will delay entry and may disrupt learning in the classroom. Procedures should be put in place for any person who arrives late as they should not be able to enter unless a staff member is there to monitor their entry. To help prevent spread, students should not be allowed to gather in the hallways and head directly to their assigned classroom. Each of these transitions if not managed efficiently will have an impact on the start times of learning.

Switching Between Academic Activities

Teachers realize that students are faced with numerous transitions throughout their day and each may interrupt learning if they are not managed effectively. The majority of the daily transitions take place either while students are inside, or moving to and from, the classroom. Due to Covid-19 many of the traditional transitions will still exist, while others will need to be modified or completely redesigned and retaught.

Overall, school is a very social environment, where students interact with a vast number of their peers several times a day. Students should be limited on their interactions, especially in large groups. If possible they should stay in one classroom. Even the simplest of transitions like entering and leaving the classroom should be modified to include teachers or technology performing temperature checks and symptom screening. Classroom entry may also require the installation of hand sanitizer stations.

Based upon CDC recommendations one of the most effective way to prevent the spread to wear a mask and limit the interactions between students. As much as possible teachers and administrators should consider minimizing students' interactions and their transitions to and from the classroom. Schools should also consider limiting teacher's movement between classrooms.

Even activities that are usually taken for granted will each need to be reevaluated based on the transition's level of interaction with other groups of students. Routine tasks such as lining up, throwing away trash, going to the library or cafeteria, obtaining help, handing in finished work, or when and how to use the drinking fountain and restroom should all be reevaluated and new procedures communicated with students.

The more complex the transition and the more potential contact with other students the more planning will be necessary to find alternatives. More than likely some activities may include totally new solutions and the adoption of different approaches, while still other activities may need to be eliminated for the time being.
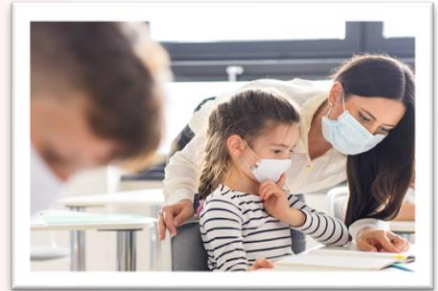
Creating efficient transitions makes for smoother running classroom and better behaved students. By establishing rules and procedures which are teachable and repeatable teachers can minimize interruptions to student's learning.

Photo Credit: Getty Images

Exiting the Classroom and Departure

As with the beginning of the day, exiting the classroom for the final time can be extremely chaotic and daunting. Due to the pandemic a student's departure may be more problematic if safety is not taken into consideration and the transition not managed effectively. With the ongoing need for social distancing and safety surrounding the prevention of spread procedures for exiting will require more steps and instruction than usual.

Exiting the classroom is not only leaving for the final time, but moving from the classroom to other areas of the school, or school grounds. Educators should consider the extra time that is needed to conclude the activities, exit, and make the transition. Due to the need for ongoing social distancing these activities should be minimized as much as possible.

Considering that student's access to transportation home may be affected by the need for staggered departure times, end of day tasks may vary significantly from what students have been accustomed to in the past. Changes will need to be addressed and taught like how to social distance when exiting, where they can expect to be picked up, and wait safely for transportation.

In the classroom prior to exiting actions like putting materials away, cleaning off desks, and disposal of trash will all need to be evaluated and retrained to ensure health and safety. Further, tasks such as what students should do with unfinished school work, realigning desks, how to store and organize their belongings, will also need to be addressed.

Upon students exiting for the day, staff should implement another temperature check and a symptom screening for students, as well as teachers and staff. If anyone has a fever or is displaying symptoms, both the school and parents should be notified. A test should be arranged, or performed on premises for the person displaying symptoms. Any student should be picked up by their parents.

Again, administrators should communicate all these guidelines with all parties and encourage social distancing and the continued use of masks outside the classroom. Once students have exited, it will be up to teachers to do an end of day inspection of classroom supplies such as sanitizer, liquid soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs, and other required PPE.

With the ongoing need for social distancing and to promote health safety, arrival to and departure from school will require more steps and instruction than usual.

Photo Credit: AP Photo/Alfredo Zuniga

Envisioning the COVID-19 Classroom

The top priority when it comes to reopening schools is protecting the health and safety of students, teachers, staff, their families, and to protect the overall community from the spread of the virus. To achieve that goal, school officials should be granted the flexibility they need to open schools safely, while providing the best education options for students during this challenging school year.

Arguably, a school's greatest challenge will be the need to implement social distancing in the classroom. However, classrooms only have a finite space in which to accommodate teachers and students who need access to them. Under current social distancing guidelines, as many as 64-75% of the students will be left out of the classroom – which is simply unacceptable.

If you have read our previous White Paper the adoption of distance learning presented its own set of challenges, especially in school districts that are less affluent. Teachers across the board lacked developed curriculum and the training in order best deliver it. Students lacked the means and technology to access it, and in certain instances the motivation to remain engaged. These were each major factors that played significant roles in exposing the inefficiencies of implementing distance learning on such a grand scale.

Distance learning and e-learning is not all bad, and without question it has a role going forward. The use of these remote learning technologies should not be abandoned simply because students return to the classroom. Probably most importantly is this mode of learning can be kept as a backup for those who get sick and stay home, or for individuals who cannot return to in-person classes for various reasons. Learning portals can be used to provide education for students whose parents choose to have them remain at home.

By bringing e-learning tools back to a redesigned classroom may further shift the traditional role of educators, making them more like coaches and mentors. Educators will need to adapt to less student interaction and continue to mobilize e-learning tools and further connect schools.

It is essential for schools to adopt and implement new technologies along with wearing of masks, proper hygiene, and social distancing. These efforts will help ensure a safe and healthy environment in order to deliver curriculum.

Photo Credit: Choe Jae-Koo/Yonhap, via AP

Making Resources Go Further

Across the U.S. our school systems are facing steep budget cuts from state legislatures as they continue to deal with the economic fallout of the pandemic. Fortunately, the federal government has stepped in with $13.5B from the Cares Act in order to help schools, and is considering providing another massive influx of funds of close to $200B to help the education system in dealing with the crisis.

School closures have disproportionately affected the under-privileged and disadvantaged students who already tend to have less access to educational opportunities. Much of the federal funds have been allocated to directly benefit these school districts. Right now, there has never been a better opportunity to make resources go further by bringing e-learning to the classrooms full-time and the implementation of community partnerships.

Community partnerships should be setup not only between schools, but should be considered between districts, and even states, in order to more effectively use resources. E-learning has created tremendous opportunities for collaboration where curriculum and resources can be shared across not only by the individual school between classrooms, but between schools, even across state lines.

Imagine a redesigned classroom where e-learning solutions are shared across campuses and ported into classrooms. Socially distanced students are able to access content in a nearby classroom – not home alone. Students may access instructors who are across town, or even out-of-state. Classrooms have a monitor or mentor who is able to assist a student's learning. Students could garner access to subjects that schools could not afford to teach otherwise. For most districts who adopted distance learning the technology is already in place.

By continuing to embrace and develop remote learning in the classroom, delivery of e-learning becomes much easier to manage. Once this is in place it also much easier to use as a backup in the case of future events, or absences. Administrators and districts should focus on assisting teachers in preparing e-learning curriculum and using internet portals for live streaming of lessons. Live streaming lessons could be done at the classroom level, across districts to conserve and share resources, or even across States.

Schools are facing steep budget cuts and educators must now do more with less. By expanding the use of existing technology in combination with the socially distanced classroom can be used as an opportunity to provide essential social activity, human interaction, and e-learning in subjects that were not available before.

Photo Credit: Alex Grimm / Getty Images

Putting it Together with Aries

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused health officials to recommend and our schools to require social distancing within the classroom and less interaction across campuses. The fact is, our existing classrooms have a finite space and social distancing has shown to restrict vital in-person instruction to an estimated 64-75% of students. For more than two-thirds of our children to simply be left behind is simply unimaginable, and is why there has never been a greater need for additional learning space.

Aries modular classrooms provide that additional space, and unlike tents they provide a quiet, comfortable climate controlled environment, and shelter from inclement weather. Our buildings are highly customizable, providing you a wide scope of possible configurations including administrative offices, portable restrooms, classroom trailers, mobile locker rooms, science labs, libraries, pre-schools, modular cafeterias, and other possible usages. Our designs are already used at community colleges, charter schools, and both private and public campuses all over the North America.

Buildings can also be outfitted with recommended safety features that are suggested to specifically deal with the pandemic, such as commercial grade UV disinfection lighting, automatic touchless doors, infrared thermometers, HEPA air purifiers, wall mounted hand sanitizers, and wall mounted LED screens for remote learning.

Our modular inventory allows us to promptly ship your buildings to your site while simultaneously progressing on the land development, we can complete your project in a fraction of the time of traditional construction. Every one of our modular classrooms is under stringent codes and regulations, so you'll never have to worry about the quality and safety of your Aries modular facility. Plus, our indoor factory processing means no weather delays, no postponed work schedules, and no surprises – so you can get to class on time.
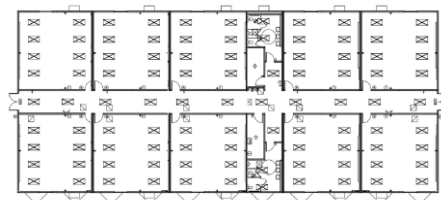
Aries Highlighted Plans
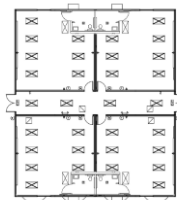
24' x 64' DOUBLE CLASSROOM -WET
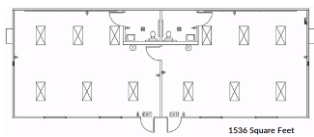
1536 Square Feet

154' x 64' TEN CLASSROOM -WET

9856 Square Feet

56' x 64' FOUR CLASSROOM -WET

3584 Square Feet

126' x 64' EIGHT CLASSROOM -WET

8064 Square Feet

98' x 64' SIX CLASSROOM -WET

6272 Square Feet

Implementing the COVID-19 Classroom

From design to delivery, Aries offers a variety of education building solutions for school districts – from temporary portable classrooms to permanent, multi-unit campuses. Let Aries bring your educational facility to the next level of safety and innovation.

Aries is proud to be a General Services Administration (GSA) approved vendor for modular buildings for more than 16 years. We are fully capable of meeting the stringent budget and time sensitive needs of different branches of government agencies looking to expand using GSA approved modular buildings.

We are also pleased to say we are a listed vendor on BuyBoard. BuyBoard is a free-to-join national online purchasing cooperative developed to streamline the buying process for school districts, municipalities, and other public entities, while saving them time and money.

School districts, cities, counties, and other governmental entities in Texas participate in the Local Government Purchasing Cooperative and have relied on BuyBoard as a trusted and experienced cooperative purchasing source for years. Governmental entities outside of Texas join the National Purchasing Cooperative to access BuyBoard and take advantage of the streamlined purchasing process that complies with procurement laws of each participating state.

We are able to design and provide specific solutions for individual schools, or across an entire district. We can work with numerous safety equipment providers and are able to custom install their solutions. Our buildings can be fully customized to include control measures to eliminate or reduce exposure and promote a healthy learning environment for our children and work environment for our teachers.

From short-term leases, operating leases with buy out options, to municipal, or long-term leases, Aries provides a wide variety of financing options that can cater to the various needs of our customers. No matter what State, District or industry, our financing arm can structure a plan to meet your needs. Our financing solutions include operating leases and finance leases (lease-to-own) as well as short term and long term financing programs.

Summary

School closures due to the pandemic have caused tremendous losses of learning for our children. If students are unable or do not return to the classroom for in-person education they are being placed at significant long-term risk of falling behind, not only in school, but in life.

While the reopening of schools is paramount for our children's future, their safety and prevention of spread should also be high priorities. The ongoing need for social distancing has presented challenges to our education system. Each of these challenges can be met head-on and solved in order to limit disruptions to learning.

Our classrooms have a finite space in which to hold students and educators. The need for social distancing in our schools presents a monumental problem, as without additional space, anywhere from 35.2 to 41.3 million students will simply be left out and not be able to reap the benefits of in-person learning.

Teachers and administrators will need to design and effective implement classroom transitions. Rules and procedures surrounding pre-class, switching academic activities, exiting, and departure are each transition that not only lead to more efficient classrooms, but for over safety of the community in the Covid-19 environment.

School districts and administrators should make their resources go further by the continued implementation of e-learning. Distance learning and portals can be used not only as a back up in the event of another closure, but this technology can provide access to invaluable resources that have not have been available prior to now.

Aries has the experience, the floor plans, and financing options that allow schools to implement and build solutions that address the issues our schools currently face. We have also established working relationships with a number of technology providers in order to implement the safest, healthiest, and most productive learning environments.

With Aries, you can get children back to school on time.

Aries

Contact

Since 2009, Aries has provided a number of education building solutions for public and private school systems and universities. We provide a variety of financing options for temporary portable classroom, or up to permanent multi-unit campuses. This has been a core business unit since day one.

Aries delivers high-quality educational facilities that provide your school with the next generation of innovation and safety. Let our award-winning team of experienced professionals work with you to implement the floor plans and design structural accommodations that meet your COVID-19 classroom needs.

Because our inventory allows us to build your facility off site while simultaneously progressing land development on site, we can complete your project in a fraction of the time of traditional construction. Every one of our modular classrooms is compliant with stringent codes and regulations, so you never have to worry about the quality and safety of your Aries modular facility. Plus, our indoor factory processing means no weather delays, no postponed work schedules, and no surprises – so you can get your students back to classroom in less time.

Call Us Today 1-888-598-6689

Refer to Code **CV-EDU** to be transferred to the appropriate representative.

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