



BESE

Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

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BESE News

BESE adopts minimum health and safety standards for the reopening of Louisiana schools

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The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) today approved minimum statewide health and safety standards for the reopening of K-12 schools in the 2020-2021 school year amid the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. The policy shifts will help ensure the protection of students, faculty, staff, and others on school property to the maximum extent possible and practical, and apply to all traditional public, charter, and nonpublic schools in Louisiana.

BESE's action is in response to House Bill 59 (now Act 9) of the 2020 First Extraordinary Session, which required the Board to adopt emergency rules informed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to provide minimum standards, policies, medical exceptions, and regulations to govern the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year. The standards approved today were developed by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) in coordination with the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) in accordance with the latest CDC guidance.

"The safety of students and educators is on everyone's mind as Louisiana prepares to reopen school facilities this fall, and it is an issue that BESE takes very seriously," said Sandy Holloway, Board president. "We appreciate the input of all who contacted us in advance of the meeting to express their concerns, and those who participated in the discussion today. The standards unanimously adopted reflect this statewide conversation and the extensive collaboration between education stakeholders and public health leaders. The result is a practical framework of required safety measures upon which school systems will build the best reopening plan for their communities."

"I'm grateful to BESE for their thoughtful, steady leadership during this uncertain time," said Dr. Cade Brumley, State Superintendent of Education. "This sets minimum health and safety standards for every school in the state, while also allowing for local decision making by system leaders."

The policies outline baseline public health requirements for school boards and local governing authorities to follow when reopening facilities to students in fall 2020. Each Local Education Agency (LEA) is required to adopt policies in accordance with the state's standards prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year and submit a plan to the LDE addressing each phase of reopening.

The complete set of standards is [available for public viewing online](#). Specific requirements within the policy are defined according to the state's current reopening phase (phase 1, phase 2, or phase 3). A general summary of the standards follows:

- **Group sizes:** The maximum group size that may convene indoors in a single room or outdoors at any time are 10 individuals (phase 1), 25 individuals (phase 2), and 50 individuals (phase 3).
- **Group composition:** Younger students unable to wear face coverings or maintain physical distancing should be assigned static groups, which must include at minimum, students in grade 2 or lower. The composition of a group may change if students are able to maintain physical distancing. Students with disabilities must continue to receive special education services in the least restrictive environment possible.
- **Physical standards for use of school facilities:** Groups that convene indoors must do so in a room enclosed by a wall or partition. If groups convene outdoors, each group must remain separated. Schools must limit crowding at entry and exit points to the greatest extent possible. Maximum group sizes and physical distance recommendations must be maintained. High-touch surfaces in rooms used by multiple groups must be cleaned before and after use by each group.
- **COVID-19 symptoms monitoring:** Upon arriving at the school facility, each student and adult must be assessed for symptoms of COVID-19 as defined by the CDC, to include an initial temperature check. Each school must establish an isolation area for anyone showing signs of being sick, which must be cleaned after being occupied by a sick individual.
- **Face coverings:** While inside the school facility, all adults and students in grades 3 through 12 must wear a face covering to the greatest extent possible and practical within the local community context. Students in grades pre-K through 2 may wear a face covering. Children under age 2 and individuals with breathing difficulties should not wear a face covering.
- **Facility cleaning:** High-touch surfaces must be cleaned multiple times a day, including bathrooms.
- **Personal hygiene:** Students must wash or sanitize hands upon arrival at the school, at least every two hours, before and after eating or using outdoor play equipment, and before exiting the school facility.
- **Hygienic supplies:** School employees must be provided adequate access to supplies such as soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, paper towels, tissues, and face coverings when needed. Appropriate quantities are to be provided according to the role, number, and age of students served by the employee.
- **Student transportation:** Buses must not exceed 25 percent capacity in phase 1, 50 percent in phase 2, and 75 percent in phase 3, spaced to the greatest extent possible according to the current reopening phase.
- **Determinations of student placement in a distance or in-person education program:** Determinations are made in consideration of the student's unique academic, social, emotional, familial, and medical needs, in consultation with the student's parent or custodian.
- **Exceptions:** LEAs will address medical or disability exceptions on an individual basis in accordance with local policies.

The standards reflect the [Strong Start 2020 guidance](#) issued by the LDE in June 2020, developed in partnership with the LDH and the Resilient Louisiana Commission, which include best practices and reopening guidance for local school districts.

BESE approved the policies as emergency rules in accordance with R.S. 49:953 and are effective immediately. The emergency declaration remains in effect for 120 days or until the permanent rules are promulgated in accordance with state law through the regular Notice of Intent process.

As research and information about COVID-19 is updated, or if the LDH or CDC revise guidance regarding school settings, the LDE will review the standards and propose revisions to BESE as appropriate and necessary.

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For more information, contact:

Kevin Calbert

225-342-5847

kevin.calbert@la.gov

BESE is the administrative policymaking body for elementary and secondary schools in Louisiana. The Board sets key education initiatives and works to outline an education agenda to achieve continuous improvement of public education as measured by student and school achievement.

Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
1201 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
225-342-5840