



## *New Mexico School Boards Association*

### **POLICY SERVICES ALERT**

To: All Superintendents and Board Members

Date: May 2020

Re: Staff and Student Protection from Covid-19

Districts are thinking about opening school in August of 2020. Considering the Coronavirus issues that will still be of concern, one of the most pressing issues will be how to protect your staff and students from infection. Below you will find requirements and resources for this purpose.

#### Employee Protection

OSHA has had requirements for an employee protection plan by school districts since the early 1990's. As an NMSBA Policy Services District, your district should implement GBGC-E Employee Assistance. This is the district plan for the OSHA exposure control requirement. It is followed by a policy and procedures for dealing with Communicable Diseases titled Wellness Programs (GBGCA and Exhibit.)

In general, universal precautions shall be observed by all District employees to prevent contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials as found in GBGCA-E. If differentiation between body fluid types is difficult or impossible, all body fluids shall be considered potentially infectious materials.

- Reference the Engineering and work practices controls indicated in GBGC-E.
- Go to the OSHA Manual page 25 for Information available electronically and OSHA publications. Particularly reference the side headings of the Exhibit regarding Personal Protective Equipment, Housekeeping and Information and Training.
- Post a copy of GBGCA-E on Universal Precautions in every classroom and on every bulletin board to emphasis the need for caution.

OSHA regulation 29 CFR 1910.1030, the reason for the plan in GBGC-E states: “Each **employer** having an employee(s) with **occupational exposure** .... shall establish a written Exposure **Control** Plan designed to eliminate or minimize **employee exposure**.” The definition of Bloodborne Pathogens includes viruses. Although the origin of the plan was for the control of bloodborne pathogens like the viruses HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B, it is a plan for disinfection, employee protection, and maintenance of safe practices. It also is heavily influenced by procedures used by healthcare workers including masks for airborne droplets.

An OSHA prepared manual, “Occupational Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens Control Manual” (OSHA Manual) providing suggestions regarding the requirements can be found at <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3186.pdf> Standards for compliance officers are found at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/standards.html> and control and prevention of coronavirus infection at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html> .

The Environmental Protection Agency has a long list of products that can be used as disinfectants for the Coronavirus. It is called the N list and can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

## Resources for Opening School and Protecting Students and Staff

Social distancing and wearing masks may be issues that needs further investigation along with student cleanliness and contact prevention. Current guidance by the Center for Disease Control about cleaning, prevention of infection, reducing social activities, tracing the contacts and distancing can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

Below you will find a list of articles discussing social distancing as the new norm in schools. There are studies of the effectiveness of social distancing in schools by countries that did not close schools during the initial Coronavirus pandemic and reviews of literature about the actions taken by schools in the 2003 SARS epidemic. These are recommended as resources to provide options to districts given the variation in school size, classroom exits, hallway size and the needs to be taken into account considered when students and teachers return to the classrooms.

- Post-COVID-19 classrooms: What if 'keeping your distance' becomes the new school normal? <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/post-covid-19-classrooms-what-if-keeping-your-distance-becomes-the-new-school-normal>
- Inside Taiwan during COVID-19: How the country kept schools and businesses open throughout pandemic <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/taiwan-covid-19-lessons-1.5505031>
- Controlling the Spread of Disease in Schools <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3248433/>
- School practices to promote social distancing in K-12 schools: review of influenza

pandemic policies and practices

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5870081/>

- Other articles cited in the above references

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3248433/citedby/>

### Some Further Thoughts

The current practice of mass education in public schools and students moving from class to class in hallways raises questions. Can less movement of students and more of teaching staff be effective in preventing transmission of a virus? Do crowded classes need to be more dispersed? Will certain classes need to be curtailed for distancing purposes such as band, choir, recess, and physical education and will those teachers be available to supervise directed learning? Will masks or gowns need to be worn by both students and staff? If so, will the district pay for the protective items? Transportation expenses will go up if distancing is used, will the reimbursement cover the cost of running duplicate routes or fewer riders per mile?

Licensing issues and the use of staff to lower class sizes for the proper implementation of social distancing will need to be examined. For instance, can licensed teaching aids provide supervision of directed learning prepared by the classroom teachers? Current licensing may allow elementary schools to utilize substitute teachers for instructional purposes to lower class size for distancing, at least for 45 days. Should there be a request to allow these exceptions through the Department of Education?

Negative air pressure or circulation of the air in the classroom to promote the change of air and exposing possible contaminants to the atmosphere is practiced in hospitals, should it be considered in prevention of transmission of the virus? Bathroom privileges and contacts that might occur in those small spaces is in need of some thought. Even the distance or availability of lockers for storage of materials and outerwear will need examination for possible distance allocation. Will partitions need to be used like sneeze guards around desks? These issues are only some that may need to be considered.

Please call or email if you have any questions regarding this Policy Alert.

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