



Northern Illinois District

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Ministry beyond Social Distancing

Reopening Churches, Schools, and Early Childhood Centers for the LCMS Northern Illinois District



Psalm 30:5b

“Weeping may last for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning!”

Part II: Schools and Early Childhood Centers

Preamble

As our District Reopen Team began the task of preparing a resource to assist NID churches, schools, and early childhood centers to effectively reopen once the Covid-19 “shelter in place” restrictions were eased, we realized that the issues related to reopening our churches, in many ways, varied from reopening our educational institutions. While we were analyzing the many challenges that reopening our educational institutions presented, Governor Pritzker issued the order that our educational institutions would remain closed for the remainder of the school year. This afforded our team the opportunity to break our reopen plan into two parts and gave us more time to research and focus on the greater scope of reopening schools and early childhood centers.

The following is the fruit of that labor. Like Part I of our report, Part II of this report is not exhaustive, nor is it authoritative. In fact, it is the intention

of our committee that this resource be seen as a “living document.” As a team of pastors, educators, and district staff, we will continually be seeking to research the latest on educating our children in the midst of this pandemic and updating this report accordingly. Our intention is that this becomes a problem-solving document that not only helps provide a guide in reopening schools and early childhood centers this fall, but will be a tool which guides school leaders and educators throughout the school year with the latest on how best to operate a healthy educational environment.

There are many informative resources that have been produced to assist educational leaders with their reopen in the areas of facility safety, health protocols, child assessment, staff support, and best practices. We encourage each educational leader, school board, and church leadership team to read multiple resources as no one resource may be comprehensive.

How this resource is formatted

In order to navigate the information contained in this resource, we have designed Part II of our reopen report to reflect a typical school campus. All of the information gathered from our research related to a school's gym will be under the "Gymnasium" heading. All the information related to a school's front office will be under the heading "Front Office" and so forth. Because of the state's current mandates for classroom design and set up, this report will direct you to our state's website, idph.gov for those resources. The section headings are:

- School Entrance
- The Front Office
- The Hallways
- The Library
- Gymnasium
- Locker Rooms
- Restrooms
- Lunch Room
- Science Lab
- Play Ground
- Campus-wide considerations

The School Entrance

Almost every school today has procedures for student drop-off and pick-up. In planning for entrance and exit of students this fall, the following points may be helpful for your consideration:

- Maintain an accurate and comprehensive list of everyone who is authorized to pick up students.
- Keep the entry and exit doors propped open during those times. Keep these points of entry/exit monitored by staff for security measures.
- Develop a staggered schedule for student drop-off and pick-up to avoid crowding.
- Use as many entry/exits as possible to optimize social distancing practices.
- Have a "foam in/foam out" hand sanitization practice for everyone entering and exiting.
- Have a temperature screening daily for each student while they are in their vehicle. This way, if a student is running a temperature (100.4 is the recommended temperature to require a student to be absent from school), they can return home immediately.



- Determine who is allowed to enter the building. You may want to consider the policy of not having parents enter the building for drop-off and pick-up.
- Make sure everyone entering the building is wearing a required mask and/or facial shield and whatever other PPE you have set as your policy.
- Make sure extra masks and/or facial shields (at appropriate sizes) are available at each entryway for those who may have forgotten or dropped their masks.
 - ☐ It has been suggested to make sure each student's mask is uniquely marked as their own so that there is no confusion and inadvertent sharing of masks between students.
- Promote a policy of "no congregating" of students in the entry or exit ways. The primary goal of entry is for the student to get directly to their desk for the day's activities. The primary goal of exit is for the student to get to their pick-up vehicle or after school location.
- Remember to project a warm and welcoming attitude in your entry places, especially in the early weeks of the school year. Students will be adjusting to all the changes to their learning environment. They may have not seen or socially interacted with fellow students for months, and many may feel overwhelmed and nervous to return to the campus. The entry way is the first place to set them at ease as best as possible and remind them they are coming to a place where their Savior is present, and their spiritual family cares for them.

The Front Office

The front office of an educational institution is often a communications center for the entire school. On any given day, the front office staff may field everything from receiving packages, to parents' inquiries, to dealing with the general student population. You may wish to consider the following modifications to your front office:

- Arrange for all payments of any school-related costs to be made online. [including tuition, fees, field trips, fund-raisers, school “spirit wear” payments, etc.]
- Establish a policy that the campus will receive visitors by appointment only.
- Establish a policy that all scheduled visitors are to wait outside in their vehicles until office staff can come and escort them into the building.
- As with everyone entering the building, all visitors will need to wear a facemask and any other required PPE. They will need to undergo a temperature check and hand sanitization.
- Consider installing some kind of clear protective shield at the front desk.
- Allow only as many visitors at the front office as that which would maintain social distancing policies.
- Consider installing an outdoor mailbox or a secured drop box for mail and package deliveries.
- Whenever possible, have front office staff stationed at a school entrance to field parent questions. You may consider designating certain days of the week as “Ask the Front Office” days when those support staff members will be at the entry ways of your school to be available to parents.
- You may want to set up a dedicated cell phone for texting the front office at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Communication with parents, faculty, and staff is vital and even more so as we learn to live with this pandemic. Develop a communication strategy that engages all your means of communication (emails, physical mailings, video postings, social media platforms, etc.), that covers your priorities (educational goals, athletics, extracurricular activities, field trips, fundraisers, etc.), and provides frequent opportunities each week for everyone to gain access to needed information. Over-communication, with a value to share encouragement and a hopeful attitude, will help everyone develop a greater sense of wellbeing and connectedness to your school’s ministry.

The Hallways

Social distancing is a new normal and will be a goal to maintain in every aspect of your school’s environment. The hallways of your campus buildings may be the most difficult area to achieve that goal. While it is unlikely that hallway interactions will 100% of the time achieve a perfect mark for social distancing, the following ideas may



help your school maintain a high standard for this practice.

- Mark x’s on hallway floors that are six feet apart. This will help with lining students up to move out of an area of the building. It will also be a continual reminder to students to maintain social distance.
- Where possible, create halls that are “one way” halls to slow the possibility of close contact with others moving in the opposite direction.
- A fun way to achieve “one way” halls is to mark the halls with traffic-like street signs [you may even want to assign street names to your hallways and get signage that marks them this way.] A simple way to mark the halls is to have directional arrows on the floor or walls.
- Stagger class passing periods. This requires some careful planning, but if your classes need to move from room to room at certain points of the day, attempt to schedule those movements so that only one class will be moving in certain sections of the building at any one time. For example, if your school building could be divided into three general areas, you may have three classes moving at the same time, but only one per area of school.
- For a more limited approach to hallway interaction, schools may wish to consider keeping their classes in the same room for all the academic activities of the day or as many as possible. Have teachers move from class to class rather than students.
- If possible, replace drinking fountains with touchless water bottle refilling fountains.
- There are a few suggestions with regard to lockers:
 - If your school’s classrooms are adequately equipped with coat hooks and storage space for backpacks and other items students will bring to school daily [remembering that with diminished furnishings due to classroom redesign to accommodate social distancing there will likely be more space] you may want to consider not

using lockers at all. This will help maintain social distancing and reduce individual students' needs to be in the hallways.

- ☐ Stagger assigned lockers to maintain social distancing.
- ☐ Consider having same members of the same household share one locker or at least where possible group family members to have adjacent lockers.
- Continually monitor Illinois Department of Public Health and CDC website updates for changes in social distancing practices.

The Library

While the library of any school can be a vital center for learning, libraries do present challenges in maintaining best practices in a Covid-19 environment. Our team submits the following suggestions for your consideration.

- Every book and item used in the library will need to be properly cleaned and/or quarantined after each use.
- Create library bins in each classroom [have the students make their own] where needed books can be brought to each class by the librarian/teacher. Once books/library items are used they can be deposited in a classroom deposit box for sanitation and return to the library by the librarian or teacher.
- Create an e-catalogue of your library's resources and develop an e-browse and check-out system so students can reserve resources "hands free" to be delivered to their classroom.
- Use public computers to conduct AR tests.
- MAP testing headsets will need to be sanitized after each use. If possible consider assigning each student their own headset.
- Consider engaging outside rentals for your library resources. Write a plan to be approved by your school leadership board.
- If possible, repurpose your library space. It may become a storage area, or design it to become an extra classroom to accommodate more students while maintaining social distancing standards.

Gymnasium

Physical education is an important part of a student's physical, social, and emotional

development. Many physical educational activities traditionally take place in a school's gym. In order to reach physical education goals while maintaining Covid-19 best practices, the following should be considered:

- Determine what activities need to be done in a gymnasium setting and what activities could be accomplished outdoors. Whenever possible, conduct physical education outdoors where social distancing between students can be more easily accomplished.
- Determine which physical educational activities will simply not be able to be done while maintaining any social distancing practices and discontinue those activities.
- Face coverings (masks or shields) must be worn during physical educational activities.
- In Phase 3 of the Illinois reopen plans, no more than 10 individuals may be in one space at any one time. During Phase 4, no more than 50 individuals may be in any one space at any one time.
- Supply P.E. teachers/coaches with megaphones or microphones to broadcast instructions to maximize social distancing.
- If indoor instruction must be done, consider using separate partitions in open spaces.
- Utilize markings on the gym floor or walls to help participants socially distance themselves. Mats can also be utilized to designate space arrangements.
- Develop new practices for good sportsmanship displays that will replace practices such as high fives and handshakes.
- Allow students to participate in physical education activities without changing into a gym clothes. Shoe changes can be done in the classrooms prior to arriving for P.E. activities.
- Sanitize all athletic equipment after every use.
- Any school with a swimming pool or access to a pool must follow all Illinois Department of Public Health, www.idph.gov guidelines on swimming facilities.
- The school principal and school leadership boards, with input from athletic directors, and coaches, will need to determine their plan for interscholastic athletic activities. The following factors should be considered:
 - ☐ Follow all IHSA and IESA health and safety guidelines.
 - ☐ Determine which sports can be played outdoors and whether those sports need to be scheduled for

the times when weather is most conducive to those activities.

- ☐ Determine which sporting activities will need to be canceled for the year.
- ☐ Consider a policy that invites only the away team's family members to remain in the gym. This way parents who likely live farther away can remain at the activity and the occupancy capacity for the gym may not be exceeded.
- ☐ Encourage teams to arrive in their uniforms or needed playing clothes to avoid locker room usage [see below].

Locker Rooms

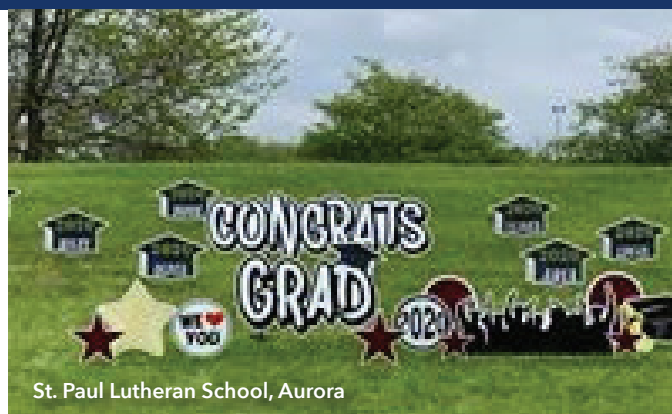
The "Starting the 2020-21 School Year" report produced by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Public Health states that districts [and for our purposes individual schools] should consider eliminating the need for use of locker rooms. This would entail allowing students to participate in activities without changing [see above]. If locker rooms need to be used, our team recommends the following:

- Stagger times for classes to have access to the locker rooms.
- Always maintain social distancing practices while in locker rooms.
- If possible, assign individual students lockers and assign fewer lockers for best practices for social distancing.
- Showers should not be required for activities.
- Convert the locker rooms into storage for the furnishings you will need to remove from each class to achieve social distancing.

Restrooms

A major factor in maintaining health is good hygiene, and proper use of school restrooms will play an important role in student health. The following recommendations should be considered for your school's restrooms:

- Post hand-washing posters in restrooms and near classroom sinks.
- If possible, have adult monitors at each restroom to encourage social distancing.
- If possible, have a "one student in, one student out" practice for restroom use. If not, seek to have only the



number of students using the restroom at one time that maintains social distancing.

- Install touchless soap and towel dispensers.
- Install touchless sink faucets.
- Install dividers between urinals and sinks.
- Whenever possible send classes rather than individuals to the restroom.
- Install toilet lids to each toilet and institute a policy of closing the lid when flushing.
- Maintain proper cleaning supplies in each restroom. Be sure to store them out of reach of younger students.
- Develop your cleaning policy with our sanitation workers and faculty. Restrooms should be cleaned several times during the school day and thoroughly at the end of each day.
- While hand washing is always the first recommended line of defense, where this is not feasible or readily accessible, make touchless hand sanitizers available:
 - ☐ Sanitizers must be at least 60% alcohol in content.
 - ☐ Sanitizers must be properly stored away from high temperatures or possible exposure to flames – in accordance with the National Fire Protection Agency recommendations.
 - ☐ Reminder: hand sanitizers do not remove allergenic proteins from hands.
 - ☐ Reminder: hand sanitizers are not effective when hands are visibly dirty.
- Visit the CDC website for free resources regarding proper hand washing.
- Make sure faculty and staff are trained on proper hand-washing practices so that can model this and train students.

Lunch Room

While good nutrition is a daily part of any student's learning, there are a number of ways to develop best practices for mealtimes in a Covid-19 environment. Our reopen team recommends the following considerations for meals and the lunch room:

- Store lunches in the students' respective classrooms.
- Provide food-safe sanitation spray for meals and snacks.
- Where possible, have the students eat in their classrooms.
- When the weather permits, set tents up and tables on the campus for outdoor eating.
- Practice distanced seating where any meal is eaten. Have students eat their meals seated back to back rather than facing each other.
- Everyone handling food must wash their hands or at least apply hand sanitizer before doing so.
- If your school has a hot lunch program, have the meals delivered to the individual classrooms.
- Develop a practice of safe storage of student masks while they are eating.
- All meal areas need to be cleaned and sanitized after every use.

Science Lab

Even where circumstances suggest that virtual learning is going to continue in the Illinois Department of Public Health's report on the coming school year, it's acknowledged that certain classes where labs are required may still need to be conducted on campus. The following recommendations for your science lab practices are submitted by our team for your consideration:

- Have a "science cart" where the science teacher moves from class to class with the daily lessons.
- Dedicate one science/lab table in each classroom.
- Create STEAM baskets to supply needed educational materials for each classroom.
- Issue individual science equipment to each student.
- If classes are coming to the science lab for lessons, arrange that the lab room accommodates social distancing measures.
- Have all lab tables and chairs facing the same direction.

- Ensure that all lab sinks are equipped with touchless soap and towel dispensers and touchless faucets.
- Keep the lab as well-ventilated as possible.

Playground

While your playground area and athletic fields may be some of the easiest places to practice social distancing, the following items should be considered for your school's playground.

- Playgrounds are closed during Phase 3 but may be used during Phase 4 of Illinois's recovery plan.
- You may want to consider not allowing the use of playground equipment due to social distancing requirements.
- Equipment that is used should be monitored so as to limit the number of students on equipment at any one time.
- Consider staggering playground times to allow individual classes "your classroom family" use of the space rather than mixing multiple classes at one time.
- You may wish to discourage the sharing of playground toys.
- Maintain proper cleaning of playground equipment; equipment that cannot be cleaned should not be used.
- High-touch surfaces such as swings, slides, and railings should be cleaned routinely and disinfected as per the most recent CDC guidelines.

Campus-wide Considerations

School cleaning and disinfection

Each school should work with its off-campus cleaning service and/or its own janitorial services to develop sanitation procedures per the recommendations of the CDC, IDPH, and its local health departments. Visibly dirty areas will need to be scrubbed to remove visible dirt then an approved disinfectant should be applied.

Clean on a daily basis frequently touched surfaces (all door handles/knobs, desk/tabletops, countertops, light switches, pencil sharpeners, computer keyboards, any "hands-on" learning items, phones, toys, cubbies/coat and backpack areas, sinks and faucets, etc.).

Determine the best means to sanitize soft surfaces

such as carpets, rugs, and curtains. Where using soap and water is not feasible, disinfect using an EPA approved product and follow all directions on their labels for safe application.

Schools may wish to consider posting their cleaning schedules and keep appropriate documentation upon completion of cleaning.

Be sure that proper cleaning supplies are available to your staff should the need arise during the school day for an immediate cleaning of an area.

Before and After-school Care Programs

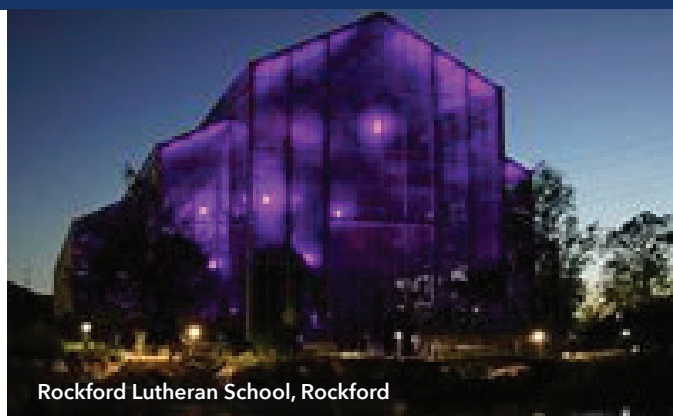
Extended day, after-school homework help rooms, before- and after-school care programs, and other services our schools often provide can be critical to the families and communities our Lord has called us to serve. According to the IDPH/Illinois State Board of Education report on Starting the 2020-2021 School Year, all before- and after-school programs need to follow the IDPH and DCFS guidance for licensed child care facilities. Child care programs in schools will be required to follow all infection and control measures that are used during the school day (e.g., social distancing when possible, face coverings, cleaning, and sanitation).

Preparing for when a Student or Staff Member Becomes Sick

In any given school year, there will be occasions when a student or staff member will show signs of illness during the school day. Each school will need to proactively prepare to address when anyone on campus shows signs of illness that may be related to Covid-19. Students or faculty and staff who test positive for Covid-19 or show signs or symptoms of the illness should stay home. Families and staff should also report possible cases to the school to initiate contact tracing for those who may have been exposed.

All school employees should be trained on health and safety protocols related to Covid-19 prior to the resumption of in-person instruction. They should be familiar with the symptoms of Covid-19 and be aware of the procedures your school will set in place to address someone who demonstrates those symptoms.

Any individual who shows symptoms of Covid-19 should be immediately separated from the rest of the school population. Individuals who are sick should be sent home. If emergency services are deemed necessary, call 911. When interacting



Rockford Lutheran School, Rockford

with someone who may have Covid-19 everyone should follow CDC guidelines on standard and transmission-based precautions.

Schools should designate a safe area to quarantine anyone who is experiencing Covid-19 like symptoms who may be awaiting pickup or evaluation. Students in this situation should never be left alone but supervised while maintaining necessary precautions.

Close off any areas of the school used by a sick person and do not use these areas until after proper cleaning and disinfection procedures have been completed. If possible, open windows in the area to increase air circulation. It is advised by the CDC to wait at least 24 hours (or as long as possible) before cleaning and disinfecting these areas. Every place on campus the sick person has been in the time leading up to identifying them as ill, and everything the sick person has used [the restroom, doors, keyboards, books, toys, etc.] is to be sanitized. An area can be open for use once it has been appropriately disinfected. As always, check with IDPH and CDC websites for updates on proper sanitation procedures.

Individuals who did not have close contact with the person who is sick can return to the school campus immediately after disinfection. Those who had contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 or is suspected of having Covid-19 should isolate at home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Close contact means the individual was within 6 feet of the individual with symptoms for more than 15 minutes.

E-learning Plans in the Event of a return to Shelter in Place or local Outbreaks

It is certainly our prayer and hope that effective treatment and vaccines are soon developed and

Illinois can move into Phase 5 of the reopening plan, it is likely that our state will experience second and even third waves of the virus (even if on a localized level) as well as a return to the “shelter in place” orders from our governor. In the event that these circumstances take place your school would benefit to have already developed a system to effectively return to an e-learning environment. The following factors should be considered in creating a return to e-learning plan.

- Regularly monitor the Illinois Department of Public Health and the State Governor’s websites for notifications of changes in our recovery phase.
- Create a communications plan so that families, faculty, and staff can be quickly notified when an e-learning plan will need to go into effect.
- Preemptively communicate to everyone who is a part of your church/school ministry what conditions will factor into returning to e-learning and what the procedure will be for students, faculty, and staff to retrieve any needed items from school in order to resume e-learning.
- Make sure the school campus is thoroughly cleaned before bringing families and employees on campus to retrieve needed items to bring home.
- If your school is addressing a localized outbreak and the need arises for a reduction in in-person gatherings on your campus, predesign a blended schedule for each class designating which days a given class will be e-learning and which days that class will be in-person in a given week.
- Follow all state and CDC protocols for cleaning and sanitizing the campus buildings before returning to full in-person learning.
- Resend communication to all families and school employees reminding them of the PPE and social distancing protocols that your school has established before returning to in-person learning.

The Source of our Strength in Trying Times

What our church and school leaders, faculties and staff, and families face in reopening our school ministries in the midst of this pandemic is, to say the least, a daunting challenge. The reason it is a daunting task is because we are striving to combine the high value of having an effective, dynamic learning environment where students are nurtured and grow in their development [faith, academic, physical, social, and emotional], with the

high value of maintaining an environment where children are continually kept safe from an invisible virus where the human body has not developed a way to recognize and fight against it. At times, we may find these two noble values seeming to compete for our school leaders’ focus and energies. This will translate into the continual stress for our faculties and staffs of heightened vigilance, the fear of falling short of concerned parents’ expectations, and in the background, the anxiety of the possibility of unthinkable scenarios. This makes for a perfect storm of exhaustion for those tasked with the high calling of caring for our little ones. The Christ-like patience, care, and support we can show for our school leaders, faculties, and staffs will be vital as we seek to reopen our schools.

Yet, in the midst of these trying times, our Lord does not leave us without His unfailing gift of grace. In the midst of trying circumstances, the Apostle Paul writes **“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” [Phil. 4:12-13]**

Another way of wording that last statement, a way that brings great comfort is, “In all things I am strong through the one who strengthens me.” Our Lord who loves us with the love that brought Him to the cross for our salvation is the source of our strength in any circumstance in which we find ourselves. In His Word, He dwells with us... to give us His unfailing love, to forgive us when we stumble into sin... to bind us to Himself and nurture us in His grace that we might be strengthened to face any trials of this life in a Christ-like way. Our Lord will not depart from us in the most challenging days of the pandemic. Instead, we can move forward confidently, knowing that through His Word and Sacraments in our lives, our Lord will strengthen and uphold us so that we might teach His children about the world He has created for us, and the great gift of His forgiving love that declares us His eternal children.

You remain in our prayers.

We are in this together, and our Lord is with us!

Special Thanks to our School Reopen Team and Consultants

Ann Ciaccio, Director of Communications, LCMS Northern Illinois District



Amy Cimarusti, Early Childhood Director, Saint Paul
Lutheran School, Mt. Prospect

Andy DeWitt, Principal, Trinity Lutheran School,
Burr Ridge

Erin Dunwell, Principal, Bethany Lutheran School,
Naperville

Lois Stewart, Facilitator for Schools, LCMS Northern
Illinois District

Donna Tennis, Principal, St. Philip Lutheran School,
Chicago

Rev. Kristopher Whitby, Assistant to the President,
LCMS Northern Illinois District

Steve Zielke, Principal, St. Peter Lutheran School,
Schaumburg

Produced by:

LCMS Northern Illinois District
2301 S. Wolf Road
Hillside, IL 60162

July 2020