

COVID-19 Mitigation Plan for Blacksburg New School
2500 N. Main St., Blacksburg, VA
540-552-6693

Updated Guidance for Virginia Public and Private preK-12 Schools
Submitting COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plans in Phase III

Blacksburg New School maintains an awareness of local public health conditions and variability in transmission rates. Our plan reflects communication with local health department; a school attorney; and a Health and Safety sub-committee comprised of doctors, public health experts, an infectious disease professional, and a well-known researcher of airborne transmission of viruses.

1) Local Public Health Conditions

- a. Do you consider your community to be one with no or minimal case transmission? If so, what public health metrics or considerations informed your assessment?**

According to the Virginia Department of Health our community in southwest Virginia (Montgomery County) currently (mid-July) has 220 total cases. We anticipate this relatively low number could change with the return of university students in mid-late August and will certainly continue to monitor.

- b. Will your health mitigation strategies vary from the Phase Guidance in any major ways? If so, how? (e.g. no physical distancing on buses; athletic competitions; etc)**

Our mitigation strategies will not vary from the Phase Guidance in any major ways.

2) Planning to Reopen

- a. Establish a COVID-19 team within the school division and a point person at each school facility. Provide names of staff and contact information.**

Blacksburg New School has a team of parents and teachers that has taken on the necessary planning and preparation for implementing the mitigations strategies needed for reopening at our one facility. Below is a listing of the board president and the two on-site employed point-people for the school year:

Kiyah Duffey, Board President:	kiyah@new-school.org	919-360-2127
T.J. Stone, Lead Teacher	tjstonebns@gmail.com	540-230-3964
Molly Lucier, Lead Middle School	mollycavewmn@gmail.com	540-357-1656

- b. Know the contact information and procedures for reaching the local health department. Provide the name of a specific point of contact and direct contact information for that person.**

Dr. Noelle Bissell, the health director at our local health department (Montgomery County Department of Health) has been very responsive with our community's questions. She can be reached at 540-585-3304. Teachers and Board President have this contact information.

c. Plan for health and absenteeism monitoring/approaches. Provide the mechanism/program/process for tracking attendance and interventions, when necessary.

BNS plans to offer both an in-person learning program and a remote learning program (for those with health risks). We plan to record attendance daily. We are a small school of under 120 total students. Each class will have no more than 14 students. Tracking and intervening is very manageable.

d. Develop, and describe below, a communications strategy that includes:

- **Orientation and training for staff and students specific to new COVID-19 mitigation strategies;**

BNS has assembled a Communications sub-committee that consists of the board president and vice-president, the personnel chair, the lead teacher, and a trained facilitator. We are scheduling orientation/trainings for all staff. These trainings will be specific to COVID-19 mitigation strategies and will put teachers in direct communication with health and safety experts. We will also provide trainings via video messages to students prior to school starting and on-site and remote trainings for students upon the start of school re: COVID-19 mitigation strategies and new school protocols. Additionally, we are working with our local community services board (New River Valley Community Services) to schedule a refresher training session in mental health first aid.

- **Plans for communication with staff, parents, and students of new policies;**

BNS has already begun regular communication with our school community. Feedback was solicited, town hall virtual communications were had, decisions have been made, and new policies have been developed...and continue to be developed. Staff, parents, and students will receive information about new policies via email, recorded messages, and video conferencing.

- **Plans for how to communicate an outbreak or positive cases detected at the school.**

The school is able to send school-wide emails via one address. We are also currently exploring text alert options.

- **Describe the division or school's participation in community response efforts.**

If adherence is what is meant by participation, our school is fully adhering to the community response effort re: mitigation. Students will be distanced according to the guidelines by VDOE and will also be required to wear face masks/coverings while indoors. We are creating outdoor classrooms to facilitate more distance and breaks from mask-wearing. Enhancing air flow, monitoring bathroom use, enforcing more frequent handwashing are also part of our mitigation strategies.

f. Prepare your division's student health services. Are you doing the following:

- **Assure provision of medical-grade PPE for health services staff;**

Anyone providing health services would be provided medical-grade PPE.

- **Assure and maintain typical (non-COVID-19) health services;**

BNS staff will maintain current First Aid and CPR training. They will also be provided with immediate consultation with members of the medical community if/when requested.

- **Describe how you will assure the maintenance of routine mental health services.**

As stated in the school's most recent reaccreditation report: Classroom teachers are exceedingly accessible to students with regards to discussions of personal problems. Teachers can also utilize the availability of the on-site teacher who is a licensed professional counselor. Needs of this kind are minimal as parents are closely involved in the well-being of their children and are likely to seek professional counseling on their own if perceived as necessary. Parents must comply with a school recommendation of professional counseling or assessment. This is part of the stated contract agreement parents sign upon entering the school community. Career counseling is not as relevant as we are a K-8 school. Please note that the middle school students participate in Life Skills classes. Curricular guide will be available for the visit.

3) Promoting Behaviors That Reduce Spread of COVID-19

- a. Create an education/training plan for staff, students and families. Consider COVID-19 prevention education (hand washing, staying home if ill, etc.). Education should be part of staff and student orientations and to be sent to all parties before reopening schools. Does your training and communication to school community members include the promotion of the following?**

Our Health and Safety Considerations Guide contains information on the following topics:

Knowledge about COVID-19 and Children

Knowledge about Virus Transmission

BNS Risk Mitigation Strategies

Considering Risks for Children

Considering Risks for Teachers

This guide will be used as a basis for education and training for staff, students, and parents/ caregivers.

Parents and staff have already received this information, and will continue to receive any updates.

Students will be provided this information before, during, and after the start of school. We are building a collection of kid resources and posters.

b. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,

Focusing education efforts and time around hand hygiene and increased cleaning protocols in the building are important risk mitigation strategies that being implemented. Students are already taught the importance of handwashing and coughing into elbow, and these will be increased. Signs will continue to be posted regarding the "proper way to wash hands."

c. Use of cloth face coverings,

Facial coverings provide protection by trapping particles carrying the virus as it leaves an infected individual's nose or mouth as well as trapping potential particles carrying the virus as another non-infected individual inhales. They also reduce the amount of virus that the wearer might breathe in from

the air around them. BNS students and teachers will wear face coverings while indoors. This will be mandatory. Mask-off breaks will be provided in the outdoor classrooms we are currently constructing.

d. Staying home when sick,

Families will be instructed with regards to health protocol and staying home. Here is the text of our daily health screening form:

In the last 24 hours, has your child or any member of your household* had any of the following:

- A new fever (100.4°F or higher)?
- A new cough that cannot be attributed to another health condition?
- New shortness of breath or difficulty breathing that cannot be attributed to another health condition?
- New chills or rigors that cannot be attributed to another health condition?
- A new sore throat that cannot be attributed to another health condition?
- New muscle aches (myalgia) that cannot be attributed to another health condition or specific activity (such as physical exercise)?
- New olfactory (smell) or taste changes including loss of taste or smell?
- Have you administered an agent such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) to your child to reduce fever or suspected fever?

If the answers are YES to any of the screening questions before arriving, then the student and all members of the household should stay home in accordance with the school illness absence policy.

*If symptoms are observed for others in the household it is possible transmission has occurred to others in the household. Due to the fact that people are contagious 2-3 days before developing symptoms, or may only develop mild symptoms that are unnoticed we request that families not send one well child if others are ill at home. Parents of sick children should not report to BNS for TRO or other activities.

e. Encouraging physical distancing.

Physical distancing is an important strategy to mitigate transmission. All major global, national, and local public health agencies have recommended physical distancing, but the recommended distance varies. For example, the World Health Organization recommends a distance of 3 feet, while the Centers for Disease Control recommends 6 feet, and many countries in Europe recommend 5 feet. Research indicates that large droplets released by talking do not fly farther than 3 feet, but maintaining a greater distance helps reduce short-term exposure to smaller, microscopic droplets. None of these distances (3 feet, 5 feet, or 6 feet) is a magic number, beyond which the risk of transmission is zero.

Our governing body, the Virginia Department of Education, recently updated its guidelines to state [“schools are encouraged to aim for six feet of physical distance to the greatest extent possible however, if six feet of distance is not feasible \(inclusive of buildings and school buses\), schools should implement a combination of face coverings and a minimum of three feet distance between everyone present.”](#) As already stated, all BNS students and teachers will exceed these guidelines by wearing facial coverings at all times while inside the building. While seated in classrooms, physical distancing will be used to the greatest extent possible. Current layouts suggest that 5 feet distances while seated can accommodate 14 students in classrooms. A Fire Marshall has visited BNS to view a room arranged for 14 distanced students and found it to be in compliance with fire code. While outside taking breaks from wearing a facial covering, physical distancing between students or teachers will be in

excess of six feet. Brief exposures at close distances, such as walking by someone, have not been shown to result in transmission. If students/teachers will be closer than 6 feet for longer durations while outside, they will wear masks. Additionally, students will remain with their classroom while outside to minimize contact with other cohorts.

f. Maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene.

The school will maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene. Our cleaning supervisor and other members of the school's Health and Safety sub-committee are well-versed in the chemistry and acquisition of the cleaning supplies needed to promote healthy hygiene.

g. Provide signs and messaging to promote healthy hygiene.

Yes, we are collecting and installing signs and picture messaging that promotes healthy hygiene—including messages about handwashing, mask-wearing, and germ transmission.

h. Promote physical distancing. Explain how you will promote physical distancing, including the following:

BNS will improve upon the guidelines by wearing facial coverings at all times while inside the building. While seated in classrooms, physical distancing will be used to the greatest extent possible. Current layouts suggest that 5 feet distances while seated can accommodate 14 students in classrooms. A Fire Marshall has visited BNS to view a room arranged for 14 distanced students and found it to be in compliance with fire code. It is likely that all or most classrooms will have two or more students needing to learn remotely—which enables even more distancing inside the classrooms. While outside taking breaks from wearing a facial covering, physical distancing between students or teachers will be in excess of six feet. Brief exposures at close distances, such as walking by someone, have not been shown to result in transmission. If students/teachers will be closer than 6 feet for longer durations while outside, they will wear masks. Additionally, students will remain with their classroom while outside to minimize contact with other cohorts.

i. Modify layouts of classrooms, communal areas and buses to ensure social distancing is maintained.

BNS does not utilize buses.

Layouts of classrooms will be dramatically modified to allow for required distancing. A storage unit has been purchased for shelves and cabinets. Individual desks have been purchased to temporarily replace large tables.

j. Develop strategies for food/dining services; these should be consistent with plans to optimize physical distancing.

BNS does not provide meal service. The school day may be shortened and supplemented with online/remote content to allow for substantial cleaning, time for attention to remote learners, and to mitigate the risks associated with lunch time. We plan to ask parents to pack a substantial and easy-to-open snack for late morning. Students will eat in an outdoor classroom whenever weather allows. When inside they will eat in staggered groups in clusters so that not all students have masks off at the same time.

k. Limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing place during gatherings.

BNS will limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing during any gatherings. We plan to amend our events calendar and shift away from any larger gatherings (such as history and science fairs, Thanksgiving celebration, fundraising events) entirely for as long as needed.

- I. **Follow relevant Virginia Phase Guidance[1] for Schools and [CDC guidance](#) for recreational sports for school-related sports and other recreational activities.**

BNS does not participate in organized group sports. We will, however, seek CDC and other guidance for safe recess and any playground use.

4) Maintaining Healthy Environments and Operations

- a. **Plan for health monitoring of staff and students. Your plan should address the following: (1) Will health screenings of students or staff take place? (2) If so, when, where, and by whom?**

Although the CDC recently released guidance on health screenings in K-12 settings, we plan to conduct daily health screenings during our morning drop-off period. Trained parent volunteers wearing PPE will meet parents and children arriving at school in our drop-off lane. The parent volunteers will approach cars but maintain a safe social distance. They will have thermometers and clipboards that contain a) a sheet listing [daily screening questions](#) and b) a roster by class of in-person students. The TRO parents will take temps through the car window and write the number on the roster and ask the screening questions (one time for all kids in car). If the kids are cleared to enter school, the TRO parent initials the roster by the student(s)' name(s), ensures masks are on the kids, and leads them to an additional TRO parent who leads kids to their classroom door or meeting spot outside. Once all students have been screened and dropped off for the day, TRO parents collect all clipboards and return to an agreed upon location/person so that rosters can be filed and clipboards can be prepared for the next day.

- b. **Hygiene Practices: Are you promoting the following hygiene practices? (Y/N)**

- a. **Create cleaning and disinfection protocols that include frequently touched surfaces; transport vehicles; schedules for increased cleaning, routine cleaning, and disinfection; ensuring adequate cleaning supplies and correct use/storage.**

Yes, we have created new [handwashing policies and guidelines and bathroom policies](#).

- b. **Provide additional hand sanitizer/handwashing stations.**

Yes. We are installing 5 outdoor hand washing stations and will have hand sanitizer stations in each classroom.

- c. **Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing to the extent possible (e.g. dedicated student supplies, lab equipment, computers, etc).**

We are removing all communal tables and traditionally shared resources. New individual desks have been ordered and all additional furniture in the classroom will be removed to ensure enough space for in-person students. Additional resources (i.e. computers, classroom supplies) are also being ordered.

d. Have you ensured ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible?

We have tested all HVAC systems in our elementary and middle school buildings and they are being serviced by a professional HVAC contractor to repair a couple of exhaust fans that were not functioning and to add an exhaust in our computer lab to ensure isolation from a classroom. We are working to manually override fresh air intake to 100%. We are also adding in free standing HEPA air filters in each classroom and are increasing the MERV rating of our filters.

e. Have you ensured that water systems are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown? Please include water fountains as part of your considerations.

Our facility has not been shut down fully (teachers have been working in the building) so testing is not necessary.

f. Do your plans for gatherings, field trips, and volunteer restrictions align with the Executive Order in effect?

We have cancelled all gathering and field trips until further notice.

g. Have you trained back-up staff to ensure continuity of operations? Please consider both instructional and support positions.

We have scheduled a training with our health experts that will be provided to all faculty members and recorded for any parent volunteers whose positions are deemed critical for the running of the school (we are a parent-teacher coop). We have provided guidance for our communities on choosing, as well as putting on and removing PPE. We do not have permanent full or part time staff in either instructional or support positions.

5) Protecting vulnerable individuals (e.g. 65+, underlying health conditions)

a. What policy options have you created to support those students and staff at higher risk for severe illness to limit their exposure risk (e.g. telework, modified job duties, virtual learning opportunities)?

We are providing remote-only work options for teachers who have underlying health issues or other reasons that they need to stay at home. For these teachers, we have created a telecommuting policy and an FFCRA paid leave request form for any teachers who request time off. Additionally, we have an accommodation acknowledgement form for teachers who request remote-only teaching options. We are also providing fully remote learning options for those families who are in similarly vulnerable situations. We have identified [a poster](#) we can use to educate our teachers about their rights, and are following state-wide updates related to workplace safety.

- b. Describe flexible sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed.**

Our [Self-Quarantine/School Absences Policy](#) outlines our expectations for when students and teachers should remain home and when they are cleared to return to school. Additionally, any teacher who needs to be home due to illness will continue to be supported financially and substitute teachers will be provided for their class. We have a close working relationship with a labor attorney who will also help us ensure that our faculty are supported if they need to stay home due to illness or exposure.

- c. Describe your policies for return to class/work after COVID-19 illness.**

We have created a [Self-Quarantine/School Absences Policy](#) that will be shared with families and staff.

6) Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick *Please describe how your plan addresses the following:*

- a. Separate and isolate those who present with symptoms.**

We have identified areas outside and inside our school to isolate individuals who begin showing symptoms of illness during the school day. These areas will be marked to prevent access by others. The indoor isolation space(s) will be equipped with free-standing or wall-mounted HEPA air purifiers to provide extra capacity for removing viruses and other aerosols from the air. Additional cleaning supplies and PPE will be used in assisting sick individuals.

- b. Facilitate safe transportation of those of who are sick to home or healthcare facility.**

The parent/caregiver of students who begin showing symptoms during the school day will be called to pick them up from school. If a parent/caregiver cannot be reached, the school will call one of the people designated as an emergency contact to take the student home. If the sick individual is a teacher or other adult, they may drive themselves home and classroom coverage will be arranged. In case of a serious illness or accident, individuals will be taken to the hospital emergency room and the parents/caregivers/emergency contact will be notified immediately.

- c. Implement cleansing and disinfection procedures of areas used by sick individuals.**

Our facilities and health subcommittees have developed protocols for increased daily cleaning as well as cleaning protocols in the event that a student or teacher becomes ill at school. Everyone who may engage in cleaning and disinfecting at the school will be trained to follow these new protocols. Training will cover the differences between cleaning and sanitizing, achieving contact time, and in-person maps and guidance for the surfaces and spaces in the assigned room.

General cleaning and sanitation -

- Cleaning (brooms, paper towels, dustpans, vacuums) will be performed to remove any particles or dirt before applying a disinfectant agent. Presence of dirt will react with the disinfectant and reduce the amount available to kill germs.

- Sanitation (throughout the school day and nightly) of high touch surfaces and objects using (but not limited to) Green Kleen (GK) chlorinated tablets, GenEon Technologies' Sanitizer, UVC light, Lysol spray, and clorox wipes on a rotating schedule to reduce germ resistance. High touch areas include, but are not limited to, desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys.
- We will implement a cleaning and sanitation verification program to show that spaces were cleaned and sanitized by parent and professional cleaners.
- Several outdoor hand washing stations with soap and running water will be set up for socially-distanced hand washing.
- Hand sanitizer will be stationed in multiple locations both outside and inside. (Hand sanitizer is not recommended to be used in place of handwashing as it is not as effective.)

Cleaning and sanitation when someone becomes ill at school -

- **For vomitus or diarrhea (IMMEDIATE):**
 - Remove all individuals from within a 25ft radius as norovirus may aerosolize and disperse. The teacher should take students to outdoor space if possible. If in bathrooms close the stall and prevent others from using it until cleaned.
 - The vomit should be removed right away! The longer it sits the greater potential for aerosolization.
 - The cleaner should don PPE (mask, face shield, chemical resistant gloves)
 - Place paper towels over the waste and then remove the towels and its contents- do not vacuum! Alternatively an absorbent agent such as kitty litter or baking soda could be applied.
 - Work from clean areas towards the most contaminated area to minimize spread
 - Scoop the material with a disposable paper plate to minimize contact and reduce exposure to virus.
 - Dispose of paper towels in a separate trash bag that is taken to the dumpster immediately after cleaning.
 - Use soapy water or cleaner to wash surfaces.
 - Rinse with clean water.
 - Apply a disinfectant to the affected area to saturate the area and surfaces (so the surface appears wet). Allow to set for at least 5 minutes. Wipe up the disinfectant if remaining.
 - Clean and disinfect any non-disposable tools used.
 - Wash hands thoroughly after disposing of the trash bag in the dumpster. Do not use hand sanitizer as most are not effective against norovirus.
 - UVC lamp should be moved into the room and used for the required time.
- **For respiratory/flu-like symptoms (can be performed after closing):**
 - If a student/teacher was coughing and sneezing with poor coverage by the mask other students should be removed from the room until cleaning is completed. The student or teachers desk should be cleaned and sanitized that day.
 - Cleaners should use chemical resistant gloves, mask and a face shield.
 - If a surface is not visibly dirty, you can clean it with an EPA-registered product that both cleans (removes germs) and disinfects (kills germs) instead. For the Green Kleen product this will require a contact time of 5 minutes.
 - If a student has touched computers or other electronic items disinfecting wipes can be used. It may be necessary to use more than one wipe to keep the surface wet for the stated length of contact time
 - Cleaner should wash hands thoroughly.

- o UVC lamp should be moved into the room and used for the required time.

If the school is closed due to high absenteeism during an influenza or COVID 19 outbreak it may not be necessary to do extra cleaning and sanitation if the closure period includes professional cleaning and closure is at least 48 hours. For norovirus deep cleaning of more surfaces may be needed if recurrence occurs. Consult with the local health department.

d. Develop a communications plan with local health department to initiate public health investigation, contact tracing and consultation on next steps.

We have been in contact with our local health department to stay updated on this process and have developed a set of protocols for families and teachers to follow regarding self-quarantine and school absences due to illness. We will cooperate with the local Health Department for all contact tracing and will follow the decision of the Health Department's recommendation regarding the need to close.

Our policies can be found here:

[A1. Handwashing policies and guidelines](#)

[A2. Self-Quarantine School Absence Policy](#)

[A3. Travel guidelines](#)

[A4. Daily Health Screening Form](#)

[A5. Activities guidelines to reduce transmission](#)

7) Planning to close down if necessary, due to severe conditions. Please describe which if any conditions will trigger:

a. A reduction in in-person classes

Our school will reduce in-person class offerings if the state of Virginia moves from Phase III to Phase II. In this case, we will offer in-person learning to grades K-3. Grades 4-8 will be fully remote. Upon announcement of a new Phase, K-3 teachers and families will be asked about their comfort level teaching and learning in an in-person environment in the new Phase in order to quickly understand constraints. There may also be a reduction in in-person classes if the Health Department recommends us to do so based on contact tracing.

b. A complete school closure

Our school will close and offer remote-only learning for all students if the State of Virginia moves to Phase I. There may also be a full school closure if the Health Department recommends us to do so based on contact tracing.

c. A complete division closure

N/A

8) Overnight boarding schools should consult *the Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidelines and guidelines for Congregate Settings* for additional information and recommendations.

N/A