

DESIGNING YOUR SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

*Assess Your Building
Examine Your Options
Create A Plan
Reopen with Confidence*

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LAN
ASSOCIATES

School will be a different place post COVID-19. School Boards and Superintendents must determine how different it will be, and how quickly students will return. Some changes will be in how schools interact, such as social distancing, wearing masks, and implementing appropriate wayfinding. Some will involve immediate physical alterations while others might require extensive capital investment.

LAN's full-service team of architects and engineers have studied the issue and compiled a list of both short-and long-term modifications for schools to consider that will help them determine their priorities.

LAN understands the challenges presented by planning and implementing these necessary alterations before you can open your doors. As a firm whose core competency is designing educational facilities, we are prepared to stand with you in your time of need.

If you need help implementing any of these strategies contact LAN for a detailed and tailored plan.



+ IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS

Space Planning for Social Distancing

When considering social distancing in school, most people's first thought will be to evaluate how many students can fit in each classroom, but a school is not classrooms alone. We expect floor markings to be widely used to section off spaces throughout school buildings, as well as dedicated hallway routes, exits and entrances, and wayfinding to encourage social distancing. When the weather permits, moving classes outdoors will be a simple yet effective solution to avoiding the hazards present in small confined spaces.

Schools should draft a plan for safe queuing in entrance points that are based on distancing guidelines. It will be important to establish layouts that can be used for monitoring and even temperature checks for anyone who enters the school.

Prioritizing Flexibility Is Key to Success

When schools open their doors, they will need to reduce student density. This will require creative and well thought out space planning. Large spaces like cafeterias, gyms and auditoriums will need to serve as additional workspaces.

Flexible classrooms will become even more important because they provide mobility. For example, chairs with casters can simplify proper distancing. Then, when the risk subsides, this type of flexible furniture can easily be rearranged to accommodate traditional teamwork. In combination with technological advancements, this will provide the adaptability needed to keep students working collaboratively. Innovation will be vital to keeping the principles of 21st century learning in place while keeping students safe.

Flexibility in schedules will also be a popular strategy, with staggered class times and even adjusted school calendars or alternating in-class and remote attendance to accommodate smaller class sizes.

Increased Technological Capabilities and Bandwidth

As schools closed their doors, the shift to online learning has increased the need for technological capabilities. LAN has already seen an uptick in requests from schools looking to increase their wireless and server capacity, and we expect this to be a boom market in the very near-term future. To get ahead of the rush for these services, schools should evaluate their existing systems and start planning to address the new demand.

Cameras, microphones, and displays may also become standard in classrooms to facilitate remote learning. Distance learning for kids who are home sick may become a viable option, and this could mean snow days are a thing of the past.

Students, teachers, and parents have also become more familiar with online tools which could lead to a rise in their prevalence, even as the impacts of COVID-19 pass. This new technological fluency could generate an increase in online tools being used to complement in-person instruction.

Disinfection for Short Term Solutions

Schools should refer to [CDC guidelines](#) to understand what, how, and when to disinfect their facilities. From a space planning perspective, LAN recommends studying what items are easy and hard to disinfect, then considering if those hard to disinfect items are needed. Carpet, porous furniture, and shared items like toys could be removed to decrease potential hazardous touchpoints.

Every school will need to set up additional sanitizing stations with either soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers. These should be installed in every classroom, at entrances and exits, and near cafeterias and bathrooms. Schools might also consider temporarily turning off water fountains and putting tape over every other bathroom sink and urinal.

Embrace 21st Century Learning

21st century learning environments have shifted away from the uniform school design exemplified by rigid desks in rows. The prevailing philosophy today is that schools should be a welcoming "home away from home" in a building that promotes a feeling of safety and inspires creativity. COVID-19 related adjustments should not change this. Schools should encourage open age appropriate conversation with students with visual aids like posters to promote concepts like effective handwashing techniques and proper social distancing methods. It is important we still encourage children to play and relax while maintaining regular routines as much as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on students' mental health. We have told them they must remain out of school and at home for their own safety. When they return, it is important that school be a welcoming and familiar place. This is at the heart of the 21st century learning environment movement and any changes made to our school buildings should reflect this goal.

+ LONG TERM CONSIDERATIONS

Long Term Disinfection Solutions

There will be obvious and immediate changes such as barriers at the point of transaction in shared spaces like cafeterias, and a more comprehensive cleaning routine. Beyond that, there are new techniques and technologies schools might consider as long-term solutions. Ultraviolet light has shown promising results killing microorganisms and is currently being studied for use sanitizing water fountains and airflows.

The materials used on surfaces will also need to be reevaluated. Schools should use durable materials that can be cleaned repeatedly without wear and tear. Materials like copper will see a rise in adoption because of its antimicrobial effects, while ceramic with grout lines that are harder to clean may see a decrease in prevalence.

Mechanical systems will play a vital role

COVID-19 is an airborne illness, so naturally a [building's HVAC system can play a vital role in reducing the spread of the coronavirus](#). If COVID-19 is here to stay, ventilation-related strategies such as dilution, airflow patterns, pressurization, temperature and humidity regulation and control, filtration, and UV and bi-polar ionization will be used to mitigate the risk of transmission through aerosols.

Your building's airflow can have a significant impact on the spread of repository illnesses like COVID-19. The engineers at LAN Associates have studied the issue and concluded which HVAC modifications are needed help purify your school's air and reduce the spread.

Avoiding Contact with High Risk Surfaces and Fixtures

Items that are repeatedly touched like doorknobs and light switches carry the risk of spreading a virus, so touchless technologies that eliminate the risk could see a rise in popularity. This would be especially true for bathrooms and cafeteria entry. For fixtures like desks that must be touched regularly by different students, a school might consider a system of paper placemats that could help reduce spread through contact.

What we know about COVID-19, how it spreads and how long it survives outside a host is changing rapidly. LAN's recommendations are based on the latest data available at this time. As the science becomes more clear and new information comes to light, LAN will keep our clients informed with updated recommendations.





+ WE'RE HERE TO HELP

LAN is a leader in educational facility design. If you have any questions about how to prepare your school for a reopening, LAN is here to guide you. We encourage you to contact our team with any inquiries. Visit our [COVID-19 services page](#) for additional information.



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