

Make Decisions for Calendars and Daily Schedules

Schools, districts and states will likely face different or changing school year calendars and daily schedules for the 2020-21 school year. A local or state task force will need to make decisions by July 1 about potential changes. These changes may impact the teaching workforce, attendance policies and the physical and mental well-being of students and staff. SREB offers the following five potential actions for consideration by local and state task forces.

1. Focus on Safety

Calendar and schedule decisions should be made in collaboration with community health officials. Any calendar for the opening of school must ensure that schools meet community guidelines for cleanliness and safety when they open.

Make certain that community health leaders contribute to task force decisions. Consider identifying a district health liaison who will work closely with community health officials to ensure that school facilities and buses meet safety guidelines prior to the opening of school. Once a calendar is set, have the health liaison work with school leaders to establish plans for ensuring the ongoing safety of school facilities.

2. Determine a Calendar

The task force will need to determine when schools can open safely and develop a schedule that works for the community. Decisions will need to be made about holidays, planned breaks, testing and other typical school calendar items, but also include the possibility of reoccurring waves of COVID-19 or influenza infections. Potential calendars options with sample pros and cons include, but are not limited to:

- **Traditional:** School begins at the regular time in the fall and continues throughout the school year.
 - **Pro:** Provides stability, as it is what students, parents and staff are familiar with
 - **Con:** Does not address the possibility of reoccurring waves of infections or confirmed cases within schools
- **Adjusted:** School begins earlier or later than normal in the school year.
 - **Pro:** Maintains stability by creating few changes other than new start and end dates
 - **Cons:** Requires communities to be informed early so they can address access to child care and other issues; does not address the possibility of reoccurring waves of infections or confirmed cases within schools
- **Postponed:** School is delayed substantially from its regular start time, then continues into the following summer.
 - **Pros:** Provides time for schools to plan professional learning for staff and develop plans to address specific concerns, such as confirmed cases, mental health issues and other anticipated problems
 - **Cons:** May not work well if reoccurring waves of infections occur; may create hardships for parents related to child care

- **Partial:** Schools operate traditionally for part of the year and online during other times.
 - **Pro:** Allows schools to plan around reoccurring waves of infections; allows schools to provide professional learning on how to teach in a blended format
 - **Cons:** Does not address inequitable access to the technology needed to teach and learn online; raises issues for cocurricular and extracurricular programs
- **Intermittent:** Schools operate in more of a year-round schedule, taking breaks of up to a few weeks at multiple times throughout the year.
 - **Pros:** Has been used by schools nationwide; provides time for accelerated learning
 - **Cons:** Will require amendments to negotiated agreements; creates opportunities for students and staff to travel and bring the virus back to the school
- **Expedited:** Schools begin traditionally and remain open with no holidays or breaks until Thanksgiving, to reduce the likelihood of students traveling and bringing the virus back to the school. The Fall semester ends by Thanksgiving, or additional school days are offered online. The second semester begins (a) in January and ends early or (b) in February and ends late; with either option, there are no breaks.
 - **Pros:** Limits opportunities for students and staff to travel and bring the virus back to school; anticipates a wave of infections over the winter break; can be combined with virtual learning days
 - **Cons:** May create mental health or burnout issues for students and staff; does not include the possibility of waves of infections in the fall or spring

Questions task force members should ask related to the school calendar include:

- What data or criteria will be used to determine when schools open?
- How will the calendar address accessibility and equity concerns?
- How will the school calendar align with the calendars of partnering institutions, such as local colleges or universities, career centers and preschools or daycares?
- Will the calendar address local, religious, tribal or other norms or holidays?
- Has the state established specific dates or guidelines for statewide events, such as testing?

3. Select a School Daily Schedule

States and districts across the nation are struggling to determine what is an appropriate daily schedule to implement when schools reopen. Will instruction take place face-to-face, online or a combination of the two? All options should be considered to ensure the safety of students and employees. Daily scheduling options with pros and cons that may align with the [CDC's guiding principles, considerations and strategies for reducing the spread of the coronavirus and maintaining healthy environments and operations in schools](#) include:

- **Traditional:** Schools reopen using the same schedule as before COVID-19.
 - **Pro:** May lessen social-emotional and mental health issues due to its familiarity
 - **Con:** May not effectively address the CDC's guiding principles, considerations and strategies for reducing the spread of the coronavirus

- **Virtual:** All classes are provided online with an agreed-upon daily schedule.
 - **Pros:** May be most effective in addressing CDC principles, considerations and strategies
 - **Cons:** Does not address inequitable access to technology; may limit the school's ability to monitor the mental health of students and staff
- **Blended:** Students attend school for part or all of a day or week with some instruction provided face-to-face and some provided online. A subgroup of students may attend school for face-to-face instruction on certain partial days, days or weeks with a separate subgroup participating in virtual instruction on those partial days, days or weeks. The subgroups rotate face-to-face and virtual instruction.
 - **Pro:** Provides flexibility for schools while addressing many of the CDC's principles, considerations and strategies
 - **Cons:** Will require schools to provide professional learning on how to teach in a blended format; does not address equitable access to technology
- **Personalized:** Schools offer a combination of traditional and virtual instruction with parents, students and teachers each selecting the format they would prefer.
 - **Pro:** Allows students, parents and teachers to choose
 - **Cons:** Will be difficult to schedule; will require amendments to contracts
- **Differentiated:** Schools offer different options for different grade levels and student ability levels. For example, Pre-K through third-grade students would follow a more traditional model of face-to-face instruction, while grades four through 12 follow a blended or virtual approach. For grades nine through 12, another option would be an intensive differentiated schedule that has students spend three weeks all in the same course in a blended format, with the next three weeks in a different course. This pattern would continue throughout the year, with instruction offered in traditional, virtual or blended settings.
 - **Pros:** Addresses the needs of the youngest learners; helps schools follow many of the CDC's principles, considerations and strategies for the effective use of space
 - **Con:** Creates issues for families in which siblings follow different scheduling options

Regardless of the schedule option they choose, schools and districts need to adapt their daily schedules if they offer instruction in online or blended settings. Six hours of classroom time does not equal six hours online. Schools and districts should also consider how to incorporate opportunities for students to engage in project-based learning in virtual or blended settings.

4. Prepare the Community for the Impact of the Selected Calendar and Schedule

Determining the school calendar and daily schedule will require task forces and school personnel to ask and answer many difficult questions, as the calendar and schedule selected will impact students, teachers, parents, transportation systems, food services, facilities and policies. The task force should engage teachers, leaders and community members in committees to develop plans to address challenges, questions and concerns for each of these areas. SREB's website has sets of questions these committees will need to address as they plan around the calendar and schedule. Sample questions include:

- How will schools address student needs for accelerated learning to make up for skills or lessons they may have lost during the remote learning that took place this spring?
- Will teachers need professional learning on how to teach in a blended format?
- What assistance will parents need to meet the expectations of the new schedule?
- Will attendance waivers or policy changes be required to suit the new schedule?
- Will additional staff, such as bus drivers or food service personnel, be needed?
- How will the safety of the facilities be maintained?

5. Create a Communication Plan

Regardless of the calendar and daily schedule selected, many decisions will need to be made prior to the actual opening of school. The effective dissemination of those decisions to all stakeholders in the community will be critical for a successful reopening, so the task force must have a communication plan. SREB's K-12 Education Recovery Task Force made recommendations for communicating with the public that will be available on SREB's website.

Resources from SREB's K-12 Education Recovery Task Force Members

Kentucky has outlined multiple possible scheduling scenarios as part of its initial opening guidance.

Maryland's school reopening plan includes a possible four-day school week with a fifth day for professional development.