

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

from the Desk of Dr. Steve Hutton

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

Will students return to the classroom for the 2020-2021 school year? Maybe. Maybe not. Governor DeWine announced in a press conference on 6/2/2020 that schools will fully open with students returning to the classroom in the fall. However, as we have learned, plans can change very quickly, and plans will change if there is a second spike of COVID-19 cases. In his announcement about schools, the Governor did state that each local board of education will determine the date that schools will open. Governor DeWine said that he will be providing districts with broad guidelines regarding about how to safely protect the health of the students. Be prepared to ask your own questions about how the mental and physical health and safety of your child will be protected. Below are some basic questions that you can ask your child's school administrator.

1. How will the school and district ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) is available to staff and students and used appropriately during the school day?
2. How will the school and district ensure that visitors are following policies related to social distancing and the use of PPE?
3. How will the school and district ensure that social events – such as festivals, dances, and parent nights – promote the health and safety of those involved?
4. How will the school and district ensure that proper social distancing is followed during emergency events and drills?
5. How will the school and district protect the health and safety of staff who are 60 years old or older or who have other COVID-19 health risk factors?
6. How will schools and districts ensure the mental health and social and emotional needs of staff, students and families are addressed?
7. How will the school and district ensure all staff receive appropriate training on the new mental and physical health and safety protocols?
8. How will the school and district ensure appropriate steps are taken during mealtimes to promote social distancing and meet the needs of students?
9. How will the school and district ensure entry and exit procedures support social distancing requirements and promote health and safety?
10. How will schools and districts ensure health and safety policies are properly and consistently administered in all schools to protect families with multiple children?
11. How will schools and districts ensure that staff, students, and families are welcomed, reoriented, and positively connected to the school?
12. How will the school and district ensure social distancing expectations are maintained in common areas and during times of transition?
13. How will the schools and district ensure that students who are not adjusting to the new normal will be supported?

14. How will the school and district ensure that the emotional and mental health of students is assessed and monitored, and that appropriate supports are delivered to students showing symptoms of anxiety, depression, self-harm, or suicidal ideation?
15. How will the school and district ensure appropriate counseling services are available for students in need and that appropriate referral protocols are in place?
16. How will schools and districts ensure counselors and other support staff – such as social workers, mental health counselors – have the supports they need to address potentially larger caseloads?
17. How will the school and district ensure water fountains remain clean or that alternative sources of water are made available to students?
18. How will the school and district ensure restrooms are effectively disinfected on a regular basis?
19. How will schools and districts ensure that appropriate social distancing takes place on school buses?
20. How will schools and districts ensure that social distancing is observed during crisis situations that may require a child to be physically restrained?
21. What is the threshold that would cause the school to close again should there be a second wave or spike of COVID-19 cases? (*Every school has a predetermined response or threshold as to when they will close school due to weather or flu. They should have developed a threshold for a second wave or spike of new COVID-19 cases.*)

There are probably more questions that you could ask your school officials about how they intend to protect the mental and physical health and safety of your child. Review these questions. Visiting the Ohio Department of Education's website and the Center for Disease Control's website for additional guidance is encouraged.

Asking these types of questions are important for several reasons. First, these questions indicate that you are proactive concerning your child's mental and physical health. Next, you may be helping your school's administrator identify details they may have forgotten to consider for the 2020-2021 school year. Finally, the answer to these questions ensures accountability on the part of the school. Make a note of the answers to each question. Keep track of the questions where no answer was provided. After your meeting with the administrator follow up with an email confirming the answers that were given and the questions that still need to be answered. It is too easy for things to slip through the cracks without the follow up email. It is a lot of work to do the follow up email, but in the end, that extra work will be worth it.

Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**