

## Getting Back To School And Sports, Texas Style, Without A COVID-19 Vaccine



After the coronavirus outbreak hit the U.S. in March, the majority of schools went on to cancel in-person classes for the remainder of the academic year. But now that all 50 states have begun reopening, there's increasing discussion about when it will be safe for schools to resume in-person classes.

In late June, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that policy considerations prioritize "having students physically present in school," and a number of school districts have announced plans to reopen in the fall. However, the debate has become increasingly contentious in recent weeks as the Trump administration has aggressively pushed for schools to fully reopen despite soaring infection rates across the country. Will it be safe for schools to reopen in the fall? And what will it look like when they do?

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) issued new guidelines on July 17 for the fall semester as COVID-19 cases continue to rise across the state. Among the new guidance includes school systems being able to temporarily limit access to on-campus instruction for the first four weeks of school. School systems can continue to limit access to on-campus classes for an additional four weeks, if needed, with a board-approved waiver request to the TEA.

"The guidance that we've provided allows school systems to have that flexibility to serve their students effectively while also making sure that everyone remains safe during this time period, students and staff, especially," said Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath. "We obviously have a very dynamic public health situation in Texas. Our first priority is keeping people safe, keeping students and teachers and staff safe."

Parents who opted for their students to go to school in the fall will temporarily have to do virtual learning. However, any family that needs internet access and needs a device to learn virtually is still entitled to on-campus instruction every day during this transition period.

Another takeaway from the guidelines, with school board approval, school systems also have the chance to convert high schools to a full-time hybrid model once students have transitioned back to on-campus instruction. A hybrid model would mean some students learn from home while others learn in school.

Schools are also incorporating new screening technology to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. In fact, DrOwl, a medical platform built on patented technology, has provided a free electronic screening and monitoring tool to Texas schools. "As a technology company, we are thrilled to use our skills and expertise to help during this crisis. We understand the importance of a solid screening process and that it is one of the things that is helping get us get back to school in a safe, well-thought manner," said Arvind Raichur, CEO, and Co-Founder of DrOwl. "Our screening tool is a game-changer for schools, businesses, and so many other organizations throughout the world."

Many schools currently use paper tracking methods to screen those entering their facility to see if they have symptoms. Typically, each person fills out a piece of paper, which leaves the facility with a stack of papers to keep track of in order to compile into a visitor log. Proper tracking is very challenging with a paper method, especially when time is of the essence because of a COVID-19 positive diagnosis. This is why paper tracking could increase a school's potential liability.

DrOwl's technology solves the problems associated with paper-based contact tracing. At a time when every moment counts, DrOwl is helping keep employees, students, and guests safe in real-time. With DrOwl, everyone can electronically "check-in" and answer a list of questions screening for symptoms and a history of exposure to COVID-19 before they're able to enter the school.

In addition to screening, school staff and students who are confirmed to have COVID-19, or who show symptoms, must stay home throughout the infection period and cannot return to school until three days after their symptoms subside. If an infection is confirmed in a person who has been inside a school, districts must close off sections of the school "heavily used" by that person. The guidelines don't explicitly require students and staff to wear mask, but schools must comply with Gov. Greg Abbott's order regarding face masks in public places.

Students will be required to attend 90 percent of class days to receive credit for a course but can receive credit for attending classes online. Teachers and school staff must screen themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 and report possible infections to their schools.

Also, on July 29, Gov. Greg Abbott announced that the grade promotion requirement related to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for students in grades 5 and 8 has been waived for the 2020-21 school year. Typically, school systems must take into account a student's score on the STAAR to determine whether the student can be promoted to the next grade level. The traditional A-F rating system will remain in place, albeit with certain adjustments due to COVID-19.

The TEA guidelines say one week before on-campus school starts, schools must post a summary of the plan for families and the general public. It must show how they plans to mitigate COVID-19 spread in their schools based on the requirements and recommendations outlined in the guidelines.

The TEA recommends that, within the school plan summary, school systems designate a staff person or group that is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and clearly communicate for all school staff and families who this person or group is and how to contact them.

Most importantly the need for flexibility has been stressed. "I think everyone has noticed we've made changes throughout this crisis because as coronavirus continues to affect the state and as the scientific understanding of the virus continues to change, as medical therapies continue to change, it obviously necessitates a flexible response, and we will continue to remain flexible throughout," said Morath.

Posted by [Melissa Thompson](#) @ Tuesday, August 04, 2020 @ 07:20am

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