



RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN

IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19



INTRODUCTION

The UTPB STEM Academy (STEM) has created this plan to aid in navigating the reestablishment of our school to minimize the risk of COVID-19 to our employees, students, and families, and to reduce the impact of COVID-19 conditions upon returning to the district. The guidelines referenced in this plan are based on guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), [UTPB](#), and the [Texas Education Agency \(TEA\)](#). Regular updates will be made to this plan based on information provided by the CDC, WHO, UTPB, TEA, and applicable federal, state, and local agencies.

STEM decisions will be grounded in addressing lost instructional time from an extended COVID-19 closure at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. [TEA projections on COVID-19](#) academic achievement indicate “major academic impacts from COVID closures for students.” This is particularly true in mathematics, in which students are likely to return in 2020-2021 with less than 50% of the learning gains from the previous year. STEM is also preparing for an academic year that consists of additional disruptions due to COVID-19, including the likelihood of further COVID-19 closures. That being said, as an option for local school systems, restructuring the 2020-2021 academic calendar is a key lever school systems can use to address both prior academic loss and the potential of future COVID-19 interruption.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To promote the continued well-being of our employees the following guiding principles have been put in place:

1. EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT SAFETY MEASURES
2. HEALTH GUIDELINES
3. STUDENT LOSS OF LEARNING
4. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF

EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT SAFETY

While it is not possible to eliminate all risk of furthering the spread of COVID-19, the current science suggests there are many steps STEM will take to reduce the risks to students, teachers, staff, and their families. The four sets of practices that minimize the likelihood of viral spread:

- **PROVIDE NOTICE:** Requirements for parental and public notices
- **PREVENT:** Recommended practices to prevent the virus from entering the school
- **RESPOND:** Required practices to respond to a lab-confirmed case in the school
- **MITIGATE:** Recommended practices to mitigate likelihood of spread inside the school

The prevention and mitigation practices recommended in this document are designed to significantly reduce the likelihood that a coronavirus outbreak occurs on campus. STEM will take local public health guidance into account throughout the year. If our region is experiencing higher rates of COVID-19 spread, STEM will adjust its response as the public health situation changes.

There will almost certainly be situations that necessitate temporary school closure due to positive COVID-19 cases in school. Parents, educators, and school administrators should be prepared for this in the event that it occurs, while actively working to prevent it through prevention and mitigation practices.

PROVIDE NOTICE:

STEM's Return to School Plan, a plan to mitigate COVID-19 spread in the school based on federal, state, and local requirements and recommendations, will be posted on the school homepage and through email to parents. STEM's COVID-19 Response Team will include Kathleen Halford and Phylis Solomon, and can be reached at: stemacad@utpb.edu.

STEM will also notify parents about their public education enrollment and attendance rights and responsibilities. STEM's specific attendance policy and blended learning model, both of which permit virtual instruction, are discussed later in this document.

Attendance and Enrollment Notice:

1. Per Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.092, students must attend 90% of a course (with some exceptions) in order to be awarded credit for the course and/or to be promoted to the next grade. This requirement remains in force during the 2020-21 school year.
2. Given the public health situation, student attendance may be earned through the delivery of virtual instruction.
3. Any parent may request that their student be offered virtual instruction from any school system that offers such instruction. If a parent who chooses virtual instruction wants their child to switch to an on-campus instructional setting, they can do so, but school systems are permitted to limit these transitions to occur only at the end of a grading period, if it will be beneficial to the student's instructional quality.
4. School systems must provide daily on-campus attendance for students otherwise entitled to attend school who follow this document's required public health procedures and whose parents wish them to attend on campus, subject to school closure and the exceptions listed in this document. In high school, school systems may offer a less than daily on campus instructional experience if there is a need to reduce the total count of people on campus at any one time to maintain social distancing.
5. In order to facilitate an safe, effective back-to-school transition process, during a period up to the first four weeks of school, which can be extended by an additional four weeks by vote of the school board, school systems may temporarily limit access to on-campus instruction. As a result, some parents opting for their student(s) to attend on campus may be required to start with remote instruction temporarily, although any family who does not have Internet access and/or devices for distance learning at home is still entitled to have their student receive on campus instruction each day during this transition period, as they are during the rest of the year.

6. School systems are required to provide parents a notice of their public education enrollment and attendance rights and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic using a document published by TEA.

PREVENT:

Practices to Prevent the Virus from Entering the School, including Screening Questions for COVID-19

Teachers and Staff: Before Campus Access

STEM will require teachers and staff to self-screened for COVID-19 symptoms before coming onto campus each day. The self-screening will include teachers and staff taking their own temperature and reviewing the COVID-19 symptoms listed in this plan. Teachers and staff will notify the school if:

- a) they have come into close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19; or
- b) they themselves have COVID-19 symptoms. Report via email at stemacad@utpb.edu.

COVID-19 Symptoms: In evaluating whether an individual has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, consider the following questions: Have they recently begun experiencing any of the following in a way that is not normal for them?

- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Loss of taste or smell
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Shaking or exaggerated shivering
- Significant muscle pain or ache
- Diarrhea
- Nausea or vomiting

UTPB has established a Pandemic Case Management Team to assist and advise regarding issues related to COVID-19. STEM employees who have questions can contact stemacad@utpb.edu.

All Teachers and Staff should practice safety precautions recommended by the CDC, including washing hands often, staying home if sick, keeping a physical distance of 6 feet when possible, and wearing a mask to minimize the risk of transmission.

Students: Before Campus Access

Parents must ensure they do not send a child to school on campus if the child has COVID-19 symptoms (as listed in this document) or is lab-confirmed with COVID-19, and instead should opt to receive remote instruction until the below conditions for re-entry are met. Parents may also opt to have their students receive remote instruction if their child has had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19 until the 14-day incubation period has passed.

1. Before coming onto campus at the start of every day of on-campus instruction, STEM may screen all students to determine if:
 - a. they have the COVID-19 symptoms listed in this document
2. STEM will prevent any individual who fails the screening criteria from being admitted to the campus until they meet the appropriate criteria for re-entry to the campus.

Close Contact

This document refers to “close contact” with an individual who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19. Close contact is determined by an appropriate public health agency.

For clarity, close contact is defined as:

- a. being directly exposed to infectious secretions (e.g., being coughed on); or
- b. being within 6 feet for a cumulative duration of 15 minutes; however, additional factors like case/contact masking (i.e., both the infectious individual and the potential close contact have been consistently and properly masked), ventilation, presence of dividers, and case symptomology may affect this determination.

Either (a) or (b) defines close contact if it occurred during the infectious period of the case, defined as two days prior to symptom onset to 10 days after symptom onset. In the case of asymptomatic individuals who are lab-confirmed with COVID-19, the infectious period is defined as two days prior to the confirming lab test and continuing for 10 days following the confirming lab test.

Screening Questionnaire Information

1. When asking individuals if they have symptoms for COVID-19, school systems must only require the individual to provide a “Yes” or “No” to the overall statement that they are symptomatic for COVID-19, as opposed to asking the individual for specific symptom confirmation. School systems are not entitled to collect information during screening on the specific health information of an individual beyond that they are symptomatic.

2. Once it is determined that individuals who responded “Yes” to either of these questions have met the criteria for re-entry, school systems must destroy those individuals’ responses.

Visitor Restrictions

STEM will not allow visitations to our campus without an appointment until further notice. Only STEM staff and authorized personnel are allowed on campus. All visitors must be screened by STEM staff prior to entry. If visitors have COVID-19 symptoms or have a lab-confirmed case, they must remain off campus until they meet the criteria for re-entry as noted below.

Travel Restrictions

STEM will discontinue staff travel to conferences and workshops until further notice.

Individuals Confirmed, Suspected, or Exposed to COVID-19

1. Any individuals who themselves either: (a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the school system screens the individual to determine any of the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:
 - a. In the case of an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
 - i. at least one day (24 hours) has passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications);
 - ii. the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
 - iii. at least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
 - b. In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
 - c. If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either (a) obtain a medical professional’s note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or (b) obtain an acute infection test at an approved testing location (<https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/>) that comes back negative for COVID-19.

Identifying Possible COVID-19 Cases on Campus

- STEM will immediately separate any student who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school until the student can be picked up by a parent or guardian.

- STEM will clean the areas used by the individual who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school as soon as is feasible.
- Students who report feeling feverish should be given an immediate temperature check to determine if they are symptomatic for COVID-19.

RESPOND:

Practices to Respond to a Lab-Confirmed Case in the School.

Required Actions if Individuals with Lab-Confirmed Cases Have Been in School

1. If an individual who has been in school is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, STEM will notify the UTPB COVID Case Management Team, who will then notify the local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
2. STEM will close off areas that are heavily used by the individual with the lab-confirmed case until the non-porous surfaces in those areas can be disinfected, unless more than 7 days have already passed since that person was on campus.
3. Consistent with school notification requirements for other communicable diseases, and consistent with legal confidentiality requirements, STEM will notify all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case is identified among students, teachers, or staff who participate in any on campus activities.

MITIGATE:

Practices to mitigate the likelihood of COVID-19 spread inside the school.

Operational Considerations

Health and Hygiene Practices:

1. STEM will attempt to have hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water at each entrance. STEM will also attempt to provide hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations with soap and water in every classroom.
2. Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors should be encouraged to sanitize and/or wash hands frequently.
 - a. STEM will encouraged to have students engage in supervised handwashing for at least 20 seconds at least two times each day, in addition to being encouraged to wash hands after using the restroom and before eating.
 - b. STEM will encourage teaching students good handwashing techniques.
 - c. Students, teachers, staff, and campus visitors will be encouraged to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and if not available, covered in their elbows. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash, hands should be washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or hand sanitizer should be used.
3. STEM will institute more frequent cleaning practices, including additional cleaning by janitorial staff, as well as provide the opportunity for children to clean

their own spaces before and after they are used, in ways that are safe and developmentally appropriate.

- a. STEM will arrange for additional cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched in common throughout the day. This would include objects such as door handles, common tables/desks, shared supplies such as art supplies, and high touch devices such as shared laptops or tablets. o Schools should arrange for cleaning of commonly-touched surfaces in classrooms between different class groups, if the same room will be used by multiple class groups.
 - b. The CDC has provided guidance on cleaning community buildings to prevent COVID-19 spread.
 - c. STEM will ensure these products are stored safely, including storing harmful products where children cannot access them, and ensuring that harmful cleaning products are not used near children.
4. Whenever possible, STEM will open windows or otherwise work to improve air flow by allowing outside air to circulate in the building.
 5. STEM will use CDC's printed resources such as posters that promote protective measures and can serve as helpful reminders of best practices.
 6. On the first day a student attends school on campus, school systems must provide instruction to students on appropriate hygiene practices and other mitigation practices adopted in the local school system.

Health and Hygiene Practices

Masks:

1. For the purposes of this document, masks include non-medical and medical grade disposable face masks and cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth). Full-face shields may be used in place of a mask to protect eyes, nose, and mouth whenever a mask is not feasible or whenever the education context may benefit from the ability to see an individual's full face.
2. Schools are required to comply with the governor's executive order regarding the wearing of masks.
3. In addition to the executive order, school systems may require the use of masks or face shields for adults or students for whom it is developmentally appropriate.

Student-Teacher Groupings

Where feasible without disrupting the educational experience, STEM will encourage students to practice social distancing.

1. In classroom spaces that allow it, desks will be a minimum of six feet apart when possible.
2. In classrooms where students are regularly within six feet of one another, STEM will plan for more frequent hand washing and/or hand sanitizing and will consider whether increased airflow from the outdoors is possible.

Use of Non-Classroom Spaces

1. When feasible and appropriate (for example, in physical education classes as weather permits), it is preferable for students will gather outside, rather than inside, because of likely reduced risk of virus spread outdoors.
2. Schools may continue to offer extracurricular activities, at their discretion and consistent with the guidance in this document, for non-UIL extracurricular activities and with the guidance found on the UIL website for all UIL activities.
3. As is the case in typical years, school systems with policies that allow it may open facilities to the public. Operation of the facilities should be done consistent with the governor's executive orders for similar activities.
4. Campuses must plan for entry, exit, and transition procedures that reduce large group gatherings (of students and/or adults) in close proximity. Consider staggering school start and end times, assigning students to entries to ensure even distribution of students entering/exiting at each door, providing guidance to students to enter one at a time and wait six feet apart outside the entrance, and, where appropriate, encouraging parents to remain outside during drop-off and pick-up.
5. Depending upon local conditions, school systems should consider eliminating assemblies and other activities that bring large groupings of students and/or teachers and staff together.
6. Consider adding dividers between bathroom sinks, especially when students cannot be at least six feet apart while using the sinks.
7. School systems should consider practices that reduce the likelihood that students meet the close contact definition (defined below) at lunch. This could include having students eat lunch at their desks. It could include the use of seats that are spaced at least 6 feet apart. It could include the use of dividers on cafeteria tables if they can serve the purpose of shielding the students from respiratory droplets with which they might otherwise come into contact. For meal service itself, consider individually plated meals with disposable food service items for students who do not bring their own lunch.

Social-Emotional Well-Being of Students

The campus counselor will develop and gather resources for parents and teachers to access. The counselor will work with students individually or in small groups to address any well-being needs.

Staffing

1. STEM employees must continue to meet the work expectations set by UTPB, subject to any applicable employment contract terms.
2. School teachers and staff will be trained specifically on the protocols outlined in this document and the practices adopted.
3. STEM will attempt to reduce in-person staff meetings or other opportunities for adults to congregate in close settings. When those meetings are necessary, the use of masks will be required per UTPB guidelines.