

Lacking guidance from state, districts must plan reopenings

Schools anxiously await key decisions by Cuomo

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New York’s school districts must develop plans to reopen schools in the fall even though the state has not yet produced much-needed health and safety requirements or said what districts’ plans should cover.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo repeated Monday that he has not decided when schools might reopen. He said a decision will be made “when we get the data.”

“There has been no decision yet as to whether or not we are reopening schools,” he said at Monday’s briefing. “We obviously very much would like to.”

In the meantime, all districts have to prepare reopening plans for the state, a task they are currently undertaking without much guidance.

On May 21, Cuomo said the state would release health and safety guidelines for schools in early June. But nothing has been released.

Cuomo said Monday that the state Department of Health is working on guidance in consultation with Cuomo’s Reimagine Education Advisory Council “and others.” He said only that it is “forthcoming.”

At this point, districts don’t have rules or guidelines to meet, said Bob Lowry, deputy director for advocacy and communication for the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

“School leaders can contemplate options, consult among themselves, but they cannot develop full-scale plans because you don’t know what the requirements will be,” he said.

Districts have not been given a deadline for submitting their plans, Lowry said. Cuomo originally said plans would be due in July, but it is

At the Regents’ third meeting on June 22 Kathleen DeCataldo, assistant commissioner for student support services for the state Education Department, said September was “feeling very unrealistic to people as a start date.” On June 28, Cuomo said on NBC’s Meet the Press that, though New York is preparing to open schools, continuing outbreaks around the country could keep students “home for a long time.”

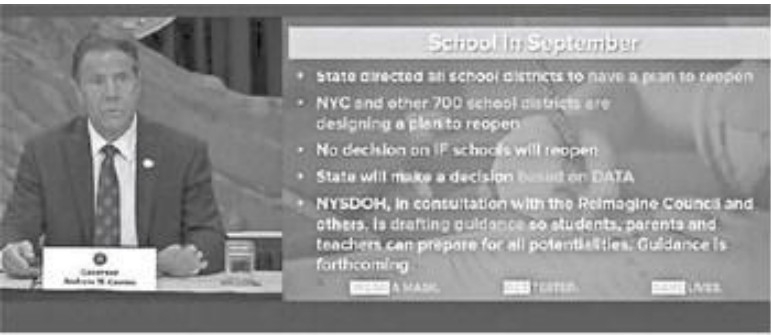
Even Cuomo determines that students can return to school, there is still the question of whether schools have the time and money to prepare for a blended model of online and in-person learning that many believe would be necessary.

There is also concern over whether teachers and school staff will even be willing to return to in-person learning. A USA Today poll in late May saw 1 in 5 teachers respond that they were unlikely to return even if their classrooms reopen in the fall.

There is special concern about bus drivers, since many are older and may opt not to return. Districts may need more drivers than they’ve had to bring students to school in shifts. Despite these concerns, other states are taking tentative steps toward opening school buildings in the fall.

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unclear whether that timeline still stands since guidance was never released. The state Board of Regents is also working on guidelines for districts to reopen schools, and is expected to release their findings on July 13. Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa has said that districts will have to submit reopening plans to the state Education Department.

Some are guessing that Cuomo’s guidance will address health and safety while the Regents’ separate guidance will be more focused on education issues, Lowry said. But right now, school leaders are unsure what their plans are supposed to cover.

The best case scenario would be for Cuomo to release his guidance this week and the Regents to follow soon after, Lowry said, so districts can advance.

“I don’t think you can come up with a plan and charge full speed ahead until you know,” Lowry said.

The Regents’ guidelines will be based on four regional meetings that were held virtually in June, with hundreds of educators and parents participating.

It remains unclear whether the governor’s guidelines or the Regents’ guidelines will have the final word come September. Cuomo will decide, though, when schools open at all – and he is not yet saying.

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