

NY releases more school reopening guidance

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Will students be required to sit six feet apart on school buses this fall?

It depends which state agency you’re listening to.

On Monday, the state Health Department said students “should” social distance on buses.

But on Thursday, the state Education Department released its own guidelines for the reopening of schools that said students “must” social distance on buses.

This apparent conflict is a big deal. If fewer students can ride on each bus, school districts could have to line up more buses and drivers at significant expense.

Later Thursday, an Education Department official clarified

in a tweet that students should social distance on buses “to the extent practicable.”

And that’s only one requirement that New York’s nearly 700 school districts have to figure out by July 31, when their reopening plans are due to Albany — and must be posted on their

websites.

The Education Department’s 145page “guidance” for schools is extensive, covering topics from facilities to student teaching. There are mandatory requirements in each area, as well as recommendations.

What about the costs of taking on so many health and safety precautions, not to mention having to prepare for inperson instruction, remote instruction or a combination of the two? The guidance warns what school officials already know, that no additional dollars are coming — and state aid could get cut.

Here are 10 things to know about the

teacher, with art, music and physical education teachers moving among rooms. Schools are encouraged to reduce student use of the hallways, leave doors open whenever possible, and consider using plastic dividers to separate students from one another.

h Schools must plan to provide mental health support services and referrals to students, regardless of whether they are physically in school. Schools are encouraged to develop a screening tool to assess returning students’ emotional needs. Districts also need counseling programs with community-wide advisory councils.

h Schools are required to develop a mechanism to take attendance regardless of school setting. If students are learning remotely, attendance should focus on reporting daily interaction between a student and

Education Department’s guidance:

- h Every district has to designate an administrator as the “COVID-19 safety coordinator,” who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the health and safety aspects of the reopening plan. Districts are required to train all staff to observe signs of illness.
- h Students need to be screened for symptoms daily. Schools are encouraged to set up a system that allows families to do temperature checks at home before school, but must make sure families are prepared. Schools will need to check the temperatures of students who are not screened at home.
- h Some students will need remote instruction, including those with family members in high-risk groups and medically fragile students.
- h Schools should be ready to provide one disposable mask per week to students (to supplement a cloth mask provided from home) and five disposable masks per week to teachers.
- h Student movement in school should be minimized. If possible, groups of students should stay with the same

teacher. If a student is not engaging in online learning, the guidance recommends assigning the student an adult “ally” to check in with the student every day.

- h When it comes to the “hybrid” model, where students are in-school part time, schools should consider assigning students to learn a task or skill at home, so they can apply it in school.
- h Schools will need to continue fire and lockdown drills, maintaining social distance.
- h Not much specific guidance is provided on grading students during periods of remote learning, only that policies should be “clear and transparent” with “meaningful feedback.”