

# READY SCHOOLS, SAFE LEARNERS

## GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–21

### Cohorting

Cohorts help manage risks in the potential spread of COVID-19. In particular, the size of the cohort matters for risk management. Student cohorting: (1) limits the number of exposed people when a COVID-19 case is identified in the school, (2) quickly identifies exposed individuals when a COVID-19 case is identified, (3) minimizes school-wide disruptions in student learning.

*An exposure is defined as an individual who has close contact (less than 6 feet) for longer than 15 minutes with a COVID-19 case. If a student or staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19, then the LPHA should be consulted to review the situation. If a school cannot confirm that six-foot distancing was consistently maintained during the school day, all members of a stable cohort group will need to quarantine until the contact tracing process is completed. The clear documentation of the cohort members will allow for the LPHA to rapidly initiate contact tracing.*

Student cohorting not only helps to quickly identify exposed people, it also minimizes disruptions to learning, because only the cohort members would be affected by the exposure. Maintaining small, stable cohorts can decrease the risk of closure to in-person instruction. A smaller cohort size of 24-36 is recommended for public health and safety. *If unexpected interaction with other stable cohorts occurs, those contacts must be noted in the appropriate contact logs.*

Students should not be placed into full-time cohort groups based on any demographic or disability criteria (e.g., students with complex medical needs, students with IEPs, students receiving language services, etc). Schools can create small groups within cohorts around skills and instructional needs. For example, a small instructional Math group can be organized that is diverse by demographics, any disability criteria, speech/language services, or English language development. *Additionally, student cohorting shall not be determined by performance and/or level of engagement during Distance Learning For All (See Section 1d of Ready Schools, Safe*

*Learners). To the extent practicable, out-of-school time programs operating in school facilities must apply the same cohorting structures as the school day.*

## **What is Required?**

- Establish stable cohorts: groups should be no larger than can be accommodated by the space available to provide 35 square feet per person, including staff.
  - The smaller the cohort, the less risk of spreading disease. As cohort groups increase in size, the risk of spreading disease increases.
- Students cannot be part of any single cohort, or part of multiple cohorts that exceed a total of 100 people within the educational week. Schools should plan to limit cohort sizes to allow for efficient contact-tracing and minimal risk for exposure.
- Each school must have a system for daily logs to ensure contact tracing among the cohort (see section 1a).
- Minimize interaction between students in different stable cohorts (e.g., access to restrooms, activities, common areas). Provide access to All Gender/Gender Neutral restrooms.
- Cleaning and *disinfecting* high-touch surfaces (e.g., desks, door handles, etc.) must be maintained between multiple student uses, even in the same cohort.
- Design cohorts such that all students (including those protected under ADA and IDEA) maintain access to general education, grade level learning standards, and peers.
- Staff who interact with multiple stable cohorts must wash/disinfect their hands between interactions with different stable cohorts.

## **What are Recommended Practices?**

- *A smaller cohort size of 24-36 is recommended for public health and safety, and schools are encouraged to create and maintain even smaller sized cohorts when feasible.*
- When feasible, stable cohorts should remain in one classroom environment for the duration of the learning day, including lunch.
  - Teachers of specific academic content areas rotate instead of students to the maximum extent possible.
  - In secondary schools or settings where students require individualized schedules or elective classes, plan for ways to reduce mixing among cohorts.
- Assign restrooms, classrooms, or other activity areas for the exclusive use of one or a small number of stable cohorts rather than the entire on-campus population.
- When feasible, limit the number of students in the building (e.g., rotating cohorts, blended learning with established cleaning between stable cohorts) to maintain requirements for physical distancing (see section 1c).