



March 30, 2021

Client Alert

PDE RELEASES NEW GUIDANCE ON RELAXED SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES AND SCHOOL CLOSURE CRITERIA

In our Client Alert on March 24, 2021, we discussed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) relaxed social distancing recommendations for schools, specifically reducing social distancing from six (6) to three (3) feet in classrooms.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has adopted the CDC's recommendations for classroom settings and released updated public health guidance for school communities on March 30, 2021. The guidelines state that elementary school students should stay at least three (3) feet apart in the classroom while wearing masks regardless of whether community transmission of COVID-19 is low, moderate, substantial, or high. Middle and high school students may follow the three (3) foot recommendation if community transmission is low or moderate; however, these students should remain six (6) feet apart to the maximum extent feasible in communities where transmission is substantial. PDE continues to recommend that six (6) feet of distance be maintained outside the classroom, to the maximum extent feasible.

School administrators should review the updated social/physical distancing recommendations carefully. The relaxed social distancing measures do not eliminate or otherwise alter the current universal face covering requirements; as such, students must continue to maintain at least six (6) feet of social distance in cafeterias in order to remove face coverings to eat. Notably, the definition of "close contacts" has not been altered, so some school districts may choose to maintain their current arrangements for social distancing to limit the potential for exposure and quarantine of students.

PDE likewise updated its guidance for schools on responding to confirmed cases of COVID-19 in school buildings and reduced the number of days out of school for closures in small, medium, and large school buildings. School administrators should carefully review the updated recommendations, associated charts, and any other updated guidance available on PDE's website relative to these recommendations.

The above referenced guidance from PDE goes into effect on Monday, April 5, 2021 and can be found on PDE's website.

Resources: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Pages/WhatsNew.aspx>

As with all other Client Alerts, these guidelines/recommendations are subject to change on a daily or weekly basis depending on Orders from Governor Wolf, the Pennsylvania Department of Education or Pennsylvania Secretary of Health.

While the Beard Legal Group Client Alert is designed to provide information on topics of concern to Pennsylvania Public Schools, it is not legal advice and school districts should contact their Solicitor, Labor of Special Counsel for advice related to their specific circumstances.

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