

5 Alarming and Dangerous Practices Your School Might Be Doing During Covid-19 – *And how to fix them* – Revealed



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“I have been looking at my classes and already have 4 out of 6 sitting between 25 and 30 students. No way to space them out. I’m absolutely terrified to walk back into that situation. ... I used to joke about dying in the classroom. Now it seems like a real probability”

Those are the words of a scared Oklahoma teacher. A professional who fears for his life. We agree that our staff should feel safe. Our students should feel safe, and everyone should feel that schools care about them. Student and staff development is in our hands and at the forefront during Covid times.

Each school district has assessed, analyzed, and determined how to best confront the pandemic without affecting the academic growth of millions of students.

But what happens when there is a lack of processes in place? What happens to the trust between staff, and teachers and their leaders? Uncertainty and distrust can cause troubles in a leadership team that usually is already under a lot of pressure.

After extensive research, we found these 5 key issues faced by schools all around the U.S who decided for re-opening. Issues that affected their community’s sense of trust, and made staff and students feel *vulnerable*.

1. Inconsistent communications
2. Lack of discipline
3. Ineffective regulations on campus
4. Lack of knowledge regarding Covid
5. Tone-deaf leadership

We will go through each of them. After reading this, you will be able to identify easy and doable changes you can apply as a leader to support your team in this fight. Let’s go through them.

Inconsistent communication is a massive source of complaint around different schools, and it affects leadership all the way through to the highest levels. Students, parents, and staff in general need to understand the changes, policies and forthcoming BEFORE they occur.

While it sounds obvious, in some cases it is not happening due to poor management.

Things you can do to prevent it:

- Set up an internal and external newsletter system that communicates weekly updates with all key stakeholders. This will not only keep communications healthy but will boost trust and sense of care in your community.
- Make sure to update your school website frequently and have a Q&A section explaining what to do in certain scenarios, ruling, and policies.
- Print communications and paste them on classrooms. Make sure to maintain a strong chain of communication starting from leadership to students.

Lack of discipline is an issue, and many schools are dealing with it. While it is important to communicate the policies, rules, and mandates it is worthless if there is not a disciplinary action in place to enforce these rulings.

And no, discipline should not be synonymous of shortened lunch breaks, or not allowing students to go home at the scheduled time. Yes, it is important to be clear and consistent, try these:

- *Recognize* teachers, staff, and students who follow the new rules and policies. Make them feel appreciated and respected. Make them understand *the why*.
- Have a recognition system on place inside classrooms. Tell students about it and correct students who fail to follow instructions by using *positive reinforcement*.
- Make sure school leadership also follows the rules and policies in place. Leaders who lead by example also *teach* by example (I.e., Use masks properly, enforce social distancing, wash/sanitize hands frequently...).

Ineffective regulations at the school level are another problem we keep hearing about. The CDC has a wonderful list of recommendations on their website. In fact, they have state it is possible to reopen schools *safely*. This only can happen IF the school has clear and strong policies in place. Discipline, as previously mentioned, can be a problem if this fails.

So, what to do?

- Follow the CDC recommendations and guidelines. Make sure your school officials are well versed on them. They include the famous hand washing techniques, hand sanitizer usage, mask usage, social distancing, as well as other key recommendations on how to sanitize and clean different areas.
- Some schools are using the **Online Wednesday's** option to deep clean, sanitize and disinfect facilities to ensure safety for their students and staff.
- Have an organized contact tracing process in place and enforce it to stop others from getting infected.

“We know that most clusters in the school setting have occurred when there are breaches in mask wearing” said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, in a call with reporters.

If school mitigation policies are correctly followed, the risk of spread is and will be kept low. It will also relieve and calm parents, staff, and students by letting them know how serious the situation is, and that schools are on top of it.

Lack of Covid Knowledge is one of the most dangerous issues educators are facing. Because we assume Covid news is everywhere and that nobody can miss it, we tend to neglect the fact that it is particularly important to talk about it. Talking about the issue, with facts and without politics involved, is the best way to raise awareness and increase stakeholder buy-in.

By raising awareness, we empower stakeholders to be empathetic with others and auto evaluate their actions and how they affect others.

Tips:

- Do not ignore the pandemic, talk about it in a professional and mature manner.
- Keep stakeholders informed (via newsletters, websites, and other channels) about recent developments pertaining to Covid and education.
- Teach about the different economic, social, and other impacts from Covid in the US and across the world. This should help raise empathy.

The last key issue we hear about often is **tone-deaf leadership** and it is extremely important to fight. Leadership should care about stakeholders at all levels. How can they show this? By communicating with empathy and being understanding. Leaders should be able to visit facilities and see how their policies are working — or not — and make respective changes. Leadership NEEDS to listen to suggestions and respond to them in a polite manner.

What to do?

- Survey parents, staff, and students on how they feel about the school situation and how can it be improved.
- Include diverse groups of parents, students, and teachers to give their opinion. Equity should not be ignored during this time.
- Have a communication plan in place, and open channels for stakeholders to leave comments, tips, and suggestions (or questions). This simple action will make your stakeholders feel appreciated, included, and part of a community.

Give everyone a voice to speak out, answer with respect, and then analyze suggestions and comments.

In case your school has re-opened or is planning to open, remember these 5 key practices to avoid and how to prevent them. Remember, having a safety environment is possible with good management and great leadership. Make use of different online resources and official information (for example the CDC website).

Do not be scared to implement new policies and. Remember, it is better to prevent than to risk. There is an old saying “*It is better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it.*” So... lets have it.