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| COVID-19 SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT  COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOL INSTITUTE | To provide support to schools during this pandemic, CSI has developed a COVID-19 School Communications Toolkit, complete with a checklist of tasks, sample letters to stakeholders, as well as online resources. |

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## CHECKLIST

*If you are made aware of a positive case in the school community (student, staff member, or family member of students or staff):*

* Ensure you have accurate information:
  + Who has tested positive (staff member, student, immediate family member?)
  + Respect the privacy of this person. Do not share their information publicly.
* Contact your [local health department](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/find-your-local-public-health-agency) immediately
  + The public health agency of the county in which the infected person resides will lead the investigation.
    - Investigating county will provide guidance on communication procedures. Guidance can very on a case-by-case and county-by-county basis.
* Contact CSI ([MichaelMcManus@csi.state.co.us](mailto:MichaelMcManus@csi.state.co.us)) if a student, staff, or immediate family member of either, has tested positive for COVID-19.
  + We advise you identify a single point of contact for these communications so that all inquiries can be directed there.
* Communicate with staff
  + Consult with local public health agency on communication language
  + It is important your staff receives communication from you and next steps prior to communicating with the broader school community so they are equipped to answer any questions coming from families
* Communicate with families
  + Consult with local public health agency on communication language
  + See below for sample letters. Note these are examples only and should be adapted for the situation and based on information from your local health department.
* If applicable: close school & implement cleaning process (see helpful links at the end of this resource)
* If applicable: implement remote learning plan

## COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Here are a few helpful key messages and tips to keep in mind when communicating with stakeholders about COVID-19:

* The school’s priority is the health and safety of students and employees.
* The school is working closely with public health officials when making decisions regarding building closures.
* Emphasize the importance of transparency and establish clear lines of communication between the school and community.
* Communicate early and often.
* State facts. Be reassuring but honest.
* Emphasize what is known at the time of the communication.
* Let your local public health department take the lead.
* Because information can be constantly changing, it is helpful to include the date/time in all communications, including in social media posts.
* Be flexible and adjust communications when needed.
* Consider creating a web page that links to the most current information from reliable sources, including the local and state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control.
* Share information through all communication channels traditionally utilized by school (social media, website, email)

## SAMPLE LETTER

***Scenario:***

* ***The school has a COVID-19 positive case (or cases).***
* ***The school needs to temporarily close the school building.***

*\*\* Please note, as the COVID-19 situation is evolving rapidly, please check with your local health department and CSI for the most up-to-date information. \*\**

*In messaging, it can be helpful to link to websites that provide guidance by public health officials rather than issuing guidance directly (i.e. “Please consult the Centers for Disease Control Coronavirus* [*Prevent Getting Sick website*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html) *for guidance on how you can best monitor your situation based on your recent contact.”)*

Dear families,

As our country fights the spread of COVID-19, we believe one of our greatest responsibilities is to communicate transparently and often with you, our school community. We have learned that a member of the [school] community who has been in close contact with staff and students within the school has tested positive for COVID-19. This means your child may have been exposed to a positive case of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). As a result, your child has been identified by [local health department] as a person with a potential risk of contracting COVID-19, which warrants self-monitoring for symptoms related to COVID-19. Please see the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) for direct guidelines on how to assist your child in monitoring symptoms over the next 14 days.

[Include information from the local health department about whether families will be notified if they have been in close contact with a person who testing positive for COVID-19]

Based on recommendations from the CDC, [school] will close for 72 hours to all personnel and families--during which additional deep cleaning will occur.

We encourage you to learn more about COVID-19. The links below will take you to two excellent CDC handouts:

1. [What You Need to Know](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf) – provides an overview of COVID-19 and a simple approach to prevent the spread
2. [What To Do If You Are Sick](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf) – provides guidance to a sick person who believes they might have contracted the virus

[School] will continue to monitor the current health situation and will continue to update families via [email, text and our website] as developments unfold. Updates will include information on food distribution schedule and location, additional closures if recommended by the state and county, and alternative learning procedures.

It is our obligation as a school community to strictly respect the measures recommended by health authorities for potential exposures, including social distancing and self-quarantine. This is a rapidly-evolving situation and guidance from the health department can change daily. You can stay up to date by visiting the following websites:

* [Local Public Health Department]: <insert website>
* Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: [www.colorado.gov/cdphe/2019-novel-coronavirus](http://www.colorado.gov/cdphe/2019-novel-coronavirus)
* Center for Diseases Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The [local health department] has set-up an information center for questions about COVID-19 for residents. Below are the best ways to reach them:

* Phone numbers, emails

Please direct any questions to [school contact] but know that we will be in close contact over the next few days with any further pertinent information.

Sincerely,

[School Leadership]

## SAMPLE LETTER

***Scenario:***

* ***There is a resurgence in the local community.***
* ***The school building must be closed for a longer period of time.***
* ***The school will implement its remote learning plan.***

*\*\* Please note, as the COVID-19 situation is evolving rapidly, please check with your local health department and CSI for the most up-to-date information. \*\**

*In messaging, it can be helpful to link to websites that provide guidance issues by public health officials rather than issuing guidance directly (i.e. “Please consult the Centers for Disease Control Coronavirus* [*Prevent Getting Sick website*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html) *for guidance on how you can best monitor your situation based on your recent contact.”)*

Dear families,

As you are likely aware, there has been a resurgence in COVID-19 cases in [X] county over the past couple weeks. Due to this, and in response to local public health guidelines, we have made the decision to revert from in-person learning to remote learning for the [timeline: 2 weeks, foreseeable future, etc.].

There is nothing more important to us than the health and safety of our students, staff, and families. We are working directly with local health officials and will continue to monitor the current health situation and will continue to update families via email, text and our website as developments unfold.

[School-specific remote learning details or links to pertinent webpages that house this information:

* Info about transition,
* date remote learning will begin,
* expectations for student engagement/attendance,
* who to contact if tech accessibility challenges]

[If applicable, include information about accessing food.]

It is our obligation as a school community to strictly respect the measures recommended by health authorities for potential exposures, including social distancing and self-quarantine. This is a rapidly-evolving situation and guidance from the health department can change daily. You can stay up to date by visiting the following websites:

* [Local Public Health Department]: <insert website>
* Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: [www.colorado.gov/cdphe/2019-novel-coronavirus](http://www.colorado.gov/cdphe/2019-novel-coronavirus)
* Center for Diseases Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The [local health department] has set-up an information center for questions about COVID-19 for residents. Below are the best ways to reach them:

* Phone numbers, emails

Please direct any questions to [school contact] but know that we will be in close contact over the next few days with any further pertinent information.

Sincerely,

[School Leadership]

## SAMPLE LETTER

***Scenario:***

* ***A staff member has tested positive***
* ***You must notify employees***

*\*\* Please note, as the COVID-19 situation is evolving rapidly, please check with your local health department and CSI for the most up-to-date information. \*\**

*In messaging, it can be helpful to link to websites that provide guidance issues by public health officials rather than issuing guidance directly (i.e. “Please consult the Centers for Disease Control Coronavirus* [*Prevent Getting Sick website*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html) *for guidance on how you can best monitor your situation based on your recent contact.”)*

*This letter has been adapted from the* [*Oklahoma State School Boards Association*](https://www.ossba.org/resources/coronavirus/covid-19-communications-tips/)*.*

*Provide this letter to employees following a personal conversation about possible exposure, if time will allow. During the conversation, be honest, calm and reassuring. Do not disclose the identity of the person who tested positive.*

Dear [Employee Name]:

Today, we received confirmation that an employee of our [school/district] has tested positive for COVID-19. While we must protect the privacy of the person involved, we believe it is best to communicate transparently with you so you can make well-informed decisions regarding your health.

As a coworker of the individual involved, it is possible, but not certain, you have come into contact with the him/her while performing your work responsibilities. As a result, [County] County Health Department officials recommend you closely monitor yourself for possible symptoms for the next two to 14 days. [Insert additional advice you receive from county health officials here, as well as details around plans for school closure/remote learning implementation]

There is nothing more important to [school] than the safety and health of our students, our staff and their families. If you have any questions or additional concerns about this matter, you are welcome to contact [Name], [Title] at [phone number]. You are valued by this school, and we are here to assist you.

Sincerely,

[School Leadership]

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Schools may want to standardize responses to the most frequently asked questions to share with staff and families as well as post on their websites. Feel free to add or adjust questions and provide a school specific response below each.*

**Who can I call at the school if I have questions while the building is closed?**

**What meal supports will be available to students and families?**

**What health supports will be available to students and families?**

**What is the best way to communicate with my child’s teachers if I have questions?**

**What supports will be available to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)?**

[School] is committed to providing high-quality services for students with IEPs during this time. [Add specifics]

**What supports will be available to students with Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs)?**

[School] is committed to providing high-quality services for students with ALPs during this time. [Add specifics]

**Is my student required to participate in remote learning?**

Attending school is mandatory for students ages 6-17 in Colorado. During the COVID-19 pandemic, [School] is providing remote learning in place of in-person learning. We understand that this may be challenging for our students, families and staff on top of an already challenging time. We are requesting that our school community makes a good faith effort to participate in remote learning.

**How will attendance be tracked?**

**How will student grades be determined?**

**What do I do if I don’t have internet accessibility or technology to participate in remote learning?**

**How will [School] continue to share updates and communications as the situation unfolds?**

**How can I retrieve materials my student left in the school building?**

## HELPFUL LINKS

Communications:

* The [COVID-19 Communications Templates and Tips](https://www.ossba.org/resources/coronavirus/covid-19-communications-tips/) page from the Oklahoma State School Boards Association includes more letter templates, including phone scripts, that can easily be adapted to your school/situation.
* The [Coronavirus Communications Crisis for Public Schools](http://images.email.blackboard.com/Web/BlackboardInc/%7Be112c604-f6a0-4cf7-9639-11a5864cd9ff%7D_NSPRA_Coronavirus_2020.pdf) resource from the National School Public Relations Association includes helpful tips, resources, and best practice examples to support all school communicators.

Colorado-Specific

* [CDE: Planning for the 2020-21 School Year](http://www.cde.state.co.us/planning20-21)
* [CDE COVID-19 Resources for Schools](https://www.cde.state.co.us/safeschools)
* [CDPHE: Safer at Home Education Guidance P-12](https://covid19.colorado.gov/safer-at-home/safer-at-home-education-p-12)
* [CDPHE Guidance & Resources](https://covid19.colorado.gov/guidance-resources) Scroll to “Schools & Child Care” section
* [CDPHE Cleaning Guidance](https://covid19.colorado.gov/cleaning-guidance)