FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will students be able to return to a brick and mortar building and return to in-person instruction?

On September 16, 2020, BIE will open school. We have put in place all the necessary safety and precautionary methods, including physical distancing, cloth face coverings, handwashing, and intense cleaning and disinfection of high touch areas based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. To be ready to open and safely perform in-school educational activities, schools will have a range of options for scheduling students, e.g., full-time attendance, rotational schedule with reduced class sizes and reduced number of students in the building. Local school leaders will make scheduling decisions in coordination with tribal leaders, states and public health authorities, and others as appropriate.

To learn more about BIE’s general health and safety guidelines, protocols for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools, school cleaning guidelines, and much more, please see BIE’s 2020-2021 Reopening Plan, Return to Learn! at returntolearn.bie.edu.

How did BIE decide to open schools during a COVID-19 pandemic?

We know that in-person learning is optimal for BIE students. When students are present at school every day, BIE is better able to ensure continuity in student academic services and enrichment. In making the decision to open schools, BIE took into account the many perspectives of tribal leaders, parents, our staff, the union, professional associations, and other stakeholders who have shared with BIE through consultation, survey responses and other outreach efforts. BIE examined the options for teaching and learning in a COVID-19 pandemic environment through the lens of equity and excellence. BIE has aligned its practices with CDC guidance for opening schools (csc.gov) to protect our students, staff, parents/guardians and authorized visitors who enter BIE schools.

Could reopening BIE schools lead to increased rates of COVID-19?

As BIE opens its doors for the 2020-21 school year, the health, safety, protection, and wellbeing of students, teachers, other school staff, parents/guardians and those who visit our schools, are BIE’s first and foremost concern. BIE has put into place many safety requirements and precautionary measures that follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance (cdc.gov). BIE’s operational and educational practices will be focused on reducing student and staff contact and minimizing the risk of COVID-19 spread through the use of commonly used areas, equipment and materials. The decisions going forward about keeping BIE schools open if there is a suspected and confirmed case of COVID-19, or a rise in positive COVID-19 cases in the community will be based on the circumstances, CDC guidance, the recommendations of experts, including the local health authorities, and tribal leaders.

To learn more about BIE’s general health and safety guidelines, protocols for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools, school cleaning guidelines, and much more, please see BIE’s 2020-2021 Reopening Plan, Return to Learn! at returntolearn.bie.edu.
What if a student has a chronic condition or compromised immune system and cannot come to school for in-person instruction?

We are realistic. There are children with medical conditions and health vulnerabilities that will not be able to come to school because they may be at greater risk of more serious illness if they are infected with COVID-19. BIE schools will offer distance learning. Students will be furnished the technology tools they need to continue learning, be provided WiFi JetPacks as necessary, and technical support when needed.

What if a student does not have access to technology for distance learning?

School leaders will provide students with an interactive instructional program. Students will have access to resources including counselors and other professionals to support their educational growth and development. It is not acceptable to drop off an instructional packet with minimal/no contact and no teacher direct instruction to the student. The alternative plan will include the following components:

**Curriculum.**
Oral, written, taped, other instructional materials that meet BIE standards of learning.

**Social-Emotional Skills/Support.**
Instructional materials and opportunities to support the development of social and emotional skills with and access to school counselors and other professionals.

**Nutrition.**
Access to healthy meals that support nutritional requirements.

**Physical Activity.**
Opportunities that support regular physical activity for well-being.

**Accountability.**
Opportunities to assess student performance, gauge progress, and provide feedback to students and parents/guardians about student progress.

**Contact.**
At least bi-weekly contact with students, e.g., phone calls, to guide instruction, check for understanding, connect students to resources and professionals, provide feedback about student progress, and discuss other instructional matters.
Return to Learn!

Are Off-Reservation Boarding Schools, Residential Settings and Peripheral Dormitories open for in-person learning?

Off-Reservation Boarding Schools, Residential Settings, and Peripheral Dormitories will only provide day-school instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Students enrolled in the 2020-2021 school year will be provided continued distance learning which may include a school Learning Management System (LMS) or an alternative educational program for students who are unable to connect to an LMS for distance learning. In deciding when to return to the residential setting, local school leaders will consult and coordinate with local public health officials and tribal leaders. Local school leaders will also coordinate with local state officials and tribal nations to determine the feasibility of transporting students back to the residential settings.

How will students continue learning if schools must close because of a spread of COVID-19?

BIE will transition to distance learning when a COVID-19 spread leads to a closure of schools. Students will be furnished the technology tools they need to continue learning, be provided WiFi JetPacks, as necessary, and technical support when needed. For anticipated closures of five days or less, there will be no requirement to switch to full-time distance learning.

How will students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) be accommodated in distance learning?

- BIE schools must serve all students with disabilities pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with all services in accordance with the students’ IEPs. This includes through in-person or structured distance learning, with an emphasis on providing in-person instruction, when possible, to this particularly vulnerable group.

- The IEP team will develop, implement, and administer the IEP in accordance with IDEA. Distance learning will not affect any rights, substantive or procedural, guaranteed to a student or parent by the IDEA.

- The IEP team will determine the instruction, services, and/or accommodations necessary to provide a FAPE to a student receiving distance learning instruction. Working in concert with DPA, the IEP team will draw from all appropriate resources, both distance and in-person, to serve the student’s needs.

- A student receiving distance learning instruction, for example, may also have access to related services such as physical, speech, and occupational therapies that may be available from the in-person school.

- The IEP team, in close collaboration with Director for Performance and Accountability, will also monitor the student’s progress toward the goals and objectives of the IEP to make sure that the student is making meaningful educational progress.
Will distance learning be available for students on Section 504 Accommodation Plans?

For students seeking distance learning instruction who are, or may be, eligible for a 504 Accommodation Plan (IAP), in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) the regularly assigned Section 504-Team will convene to develop, review and revise, as necessary, the student's 504 IAP. The 504 Team will follow the policies and procedures outlined in the BIE Section 504 National Policy Memorandum and will work with the 504 Coordinator to provide the distance learning and/or physical accommodations necessary for a student with a disability to have access to BIE educational programs and services.

What can school staff do to protect themselves and others in school facilities from getting sick with COVID-19?

BIE provides CDC suggestions and strategies in Return to Learn!. BIE strongly encourages that staff:

• Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. BIE schools will have hand sanitizers available throughout the school.
• Maintain a distance of 6 feet from other adults and from students, when possible.
• Wear a cloth face covering, especially when it is difficult to maintain physical distancing.
• Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, including tables, doorknobs, light switches, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks. BIE custodial staff will provide cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces each evening and throughout the day.
• Limit use of shared objects, (e.g., gym or physical education equipment, pens and pencils, markers, art supplies, manipulatives, tablets, keyboards, phones).
• Modify layouts of classrooms, spacing seating/desks at least 6 feet apart when feasible.
• Maximize use of on-line, phone or other non-person-to-person contact communication with parents and others.
• Teach students and reinforce use of preventive measures with them.

What happens when a student develops or presents with any symptoms of illness consistent with COVID-19?

The student's teacher will contact the designated school authority who will inform the parent/guardian that the student needs to be picked up as soon as practical for possible referral to a healthcare provider for assessment.

• The designated school authority will wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), provide the student with a clean face covering and relocate the student to an isolated area away from other students. In taking such action, the school authority will preserve the student’s privacy to the extent possible.
• The designated school authority will confidentially notify the school leader that a student COVID-19 symptoms is in the school.

• The designated school authority will close off the space used for isolation after the student departs. The space will only be reopened after proper cleaning and disinfecting.

• The designated school authority will notify the teacher and school counselor that the student is leaving school with the parent or guardian. The teacher will coordinate lessons as needed.

• The school leader will direct the cleaning/disinfection of high-touch surfaces, focusing on areas where the student is known to have been and items they have touched (e.g., individual desk, cot, recently used manipulatives, shared equipment).

• When a school identifies a significant increase in absences due to illness with COVID-19-like symptoms, the school leader is responsible for reporting the information to the local health authority and the ADD. The ADD will report it to the Director BIE.

**What happens if a staff member develops or presents with any symptoms of illness consistent with COVID-19?**

• The staff member is strongly encouraged to remain in an isolated area while the staff member awaits pickup or until he/she is able to leave the school on his/her own.

• Anyone who comes in contact with the symptomatic staff member is encouraged to use PPE, practice physical distancing, and provide the staff member with a face covering.

• The symptomatic staff member will notify the school leader that he or she presents with COVID-19 symptoms.

• The school will close off the space used for isolation after the symptomatic person departs. The space will be reopened only after proper cleaning and disinfecting.

• The school leader will direct the cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces, focusing on areas where the person is known to have been and items they have touched (e.g., individual desk, cot, shared equipment).

• If the symptomatic staff member is confirmed to have COVID-19, the staff member will follow the CDC guidelines for persons exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

• It is important that students and staff who are unwell and being sent home are picked up within 30 to 60 minutes, if possible.
Will BIE provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to appropriate staff, e.g., custodians; face coverings to students and staff?

Schools will provide PPE for staff members who need the extra protection. Although students may bring their own, schools will provide cloth face coverings to students and staff every day as needed (based on CDC guidance). Schools will have a supply on buses, too. Because water fountains will not be in use, schools will provide bottled water for students and staff. If needed for distance learning and or digital learning for in-school instruction, students will be provided sanitized, individually wrapped earbuds or headsets when needed. Hand sanitizer stations will be placed throughout the school for students and staff to use frequently. The health, safety and well-being of students and staff are our top priority.

How can parents/guardians help BIE maintain a healthy environment in our schools and classrooms?

Parents/Guardians are critical when it comes to helping students develop healthy habits and good hygiene. A student’s day begins and ends with them. Parents/Guardians are our first line of defense for the community to make sure that this virus doesn’t spread. They can help in several ways:

• Keep children home if they are not feeling well.

• Strongly encourage children to wash their hands and wear a cloth covering. These minimize the opportunity to transfer the virus for all of us. Consider talking to your child about other people who may not be able to wear face coverings for medical reasons (e.g., asthma) to educate, avoid misunderstandings, and not engage in bullying actions.

• If children have had close contact to a COVID-19 case, they should not go to school. Follow CDC guidance on what to do when someone has known exposure.

• Talk to children about precautions to take at school. Children may be strongly encouraged to:
  ▪ Wash and sanitize their hands more often.
  ▪ Keep physical distance from other students.
  ▪ Wear a face covering.
  ▪ Avoid sharing objects with other students, including bottled water, devices, writing instruments, and books.
  ▪ Use (FDA-approved) hand sanitizer (that contains at least 60% alcohol.)