

George Chidiac, Superintendent of Stafford Township: Reopening Schools During The Pandemic

New Jersey superintendent George Chidiac discusses why it is so important to open schools, the hardships students and teachers face and safety measures.

BARNEGAT, NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES, October 6, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The lockdown has not been kind on school-going children. In the near distant future when these children will be entering the real world, and similar catastrophes like such would pop up, they might find themselves dealing with it in unhealthy ways and maybe reliving a nightmare. After all, they spent a significant time sitting at home while a global pandemic was loose.

For the Stafford Township School District, schools finally reopened in September, five days per week; however, many parents are caught in-between their desire to see their children go back to school and the fear of COVID-19.

"Our top priority is to provide our students and staff with a healthy, safe, secure, and nurturing environment that supports our student's social and emotional wellbeing," said [Superintendent George J. Chidiac](#).

The closing of schools worldwide has been a rather delicate topic to discuss. We cannot shy away from the fact that the pandemic has affected many children in some way or the other. According to a survey done by UNESCO, the lockdown affected nearly 1.6 billion children's education around the world.

This indicates about 90% of the world's school-going kids. So, is the lockdown helping our children, or is it laying the path to a much darker and disoriented future for them?

Outspread of COVID-19



Stafford Township Superintendent
George Chidiac

We are still not entirely sure how the closing of schools has affected the spreading of the virus. However, the transmission of the virus is rapid in densely packed and confined areas. Yes, schools are usually crowded and are a little liberal when it comes to hygiene. But do the children have a real threat to the virus?

Though the number one priority is keeping children safe during COVID-19, the virus is not a significant threat to children as much as it is to the teachers and staff at the school. Fatal cases of the virus in children have been almost negligible. Sadly, kids may become carriers of the virus, by getting infected at school and further transmitting it to other vulnerable members of their society, like grandparents and older people.

Over the past few months, while still receiving information about the virus in bits and pieces, we were unsure about the preventive methods against COVID-19. Since then, we have learned to curb the coronavirus outbreak through social distancing, face masks, face shields, and sanitizers.

How is the Lockdown Affecting Children?

Returning to normalcy seems a little far-fetched, looking at the present condition of the country. The combined stress of staying locked in at home, being isolated, and growing a little paranoid can severely affect children. Being cut off from school interactions and social activities has made children angsty and can further delay their cognitive, emotional, and social development.

However, while children can be entertained and distracted, teens might not have it as easy. The absence of socializing through schooling can increase their risk of mental illnesses at a very alarming rate.

While some people are well off and can manage idling time at home with their families, impoverished neighborhoods have been hit the hardest during the current pandemic. Children who come from troubled families have to deal with unimaginable issues. Schools, which were once a place for them to take refuge in and interact with like-minded people, have been stripped off from their lives.

Reopening schools with preventive methods can be a massive step to slowly inculcate normalcy amongst kids, especially in cities like New York and New Jersey.

How can Schools Stay Safe?

According to the Stafford Township Superintendent, [George Chidiac](#) "The real challenge was not just to open school five days a week but to do it safely and establish extensive safety and sanitation protocols to remain open for the 20-21 school year."

With schools reopened, their sole priority would be keeping children safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Stafford Township schools are ready to take extreme preventive measures to

ensure that the virus doesn't spread, and these include:

Social Distancing and Hygiene

Social distancing or physical distancing is one of the most common words thrown around today. As easy as it is for us to stay at least six feet apart, many adults in the country still do not understand how to follow it. Luckily schools will be an excellent place to indoctrinate children in following this simple yet effective method.

"Stafford Township schools have researched and found that keeping desks six feet apart can be an ideal place to start. However, students are social beings that find it necessary to stay in close proximity with their friends. So, teachers and staff members will be very vigilant when it comes to making sure all the children are wearing correct protective gear and are a safe distance apart." [Explains George Chidiac.](#)

"When it comes to hygiene, all students will be asked to cover their faces with double-layered cloth masks and face shields. The staff will ensure frequent handwashing with soap and water is practiced frequently. Stafford schools are also considering teachers move between classrooms rather than having students fill hallways between periods. Students will also be allowed to eat lunch at their desks and not in small groups or crowded lunchrooms." Superintendent Chidiac added.

Transportation and Extracurricular Activities

Both transportation and extracurricular activities usually occur in crowded and closed areas. Thus, New Jersey schools are trying to assign a seating system in buses to ensure social distancing and no overcrowding. Students who are comfortable with personal or alternative transport will be given the freedom to choose their travel means.

Since keeping students safe during COVID-19 is the only concern schools are focused on taking care of, extracurricular activities like music, art, and gym class will be conducted outdoors. All the necessary equipment will be sanitized before and after every class.

Other Measures

Nutrition: Many students rely on school meal programs for their daily sustenance. Once Stafford schools reopen, they plan to provide free or discounted meals to students who have been financially affected by the pandemic.

Mental health support: Returning to the daily school routine can be stressful and anxiety-ridden for some students and staff members. Schools are also looking to provide mental health support for any student or staff struggling with stress due to the outbreak. Stafford township schools will

ensure that your child's mental, emotional, and social development is not affected.

Reopening schools and following the same schedule might not be easy for a while, but the Stafford township schools are doing whatever it takes to make the experience as safe and stress-free as possible.

Regardless of the uncertainties surrounding school reopening, we must remain optimistic.

"It is heartwarming and simply amazing to see our school community come together and work collaboratively through these challenges," says George Chidiac. "The Stafford Township School district and our community is the greatest place to be! We are looking forward to an incredible year!"

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