Feasibility of Social Distancing in U.S. Schools

Focus Group Interview Guide

<u>Informed Consent (Verbal)</u>

Read Statement

<u>Ice Breaker Questions</u>

1) [Moderators introduce themselves] I'd like each person to introduce themselves to get started. In a few sentences, can each of you tell me your job title and your experience with K-12 public schools? [Moderator calls on each participant]

2) Have any of you ever worked in or on behalf of schools during an outbreak of infectious disease that can be spread easily from person-to-person (e.g., H1N1 flu). What was your experience and when did that happen?

   a. *Probe*: Did anyone else have a similar experience? A different experience?
   b. *Probe*: What changes (if any) were implemented to school practices? [Probe for changes to school scheduling, classroom arrangements, instructional offerings, changes to school services.]
   c. *Probe*: What challenges did you face in responding to this emergency in terms of implementing new practices?

<u>Identification of Practices- Phase 1</u>

In this project, we are trying to develop a list of options schools can consider to decrease the spread of influenza before many students and staff get sick as an alternative to school closure.

We'd like to distinguish between two different "phases" of influenza outbreaks in this interview. In the early stages of an evolving emergency like an influenza pandemic- where a new type of flu emerges but is only causing illness on a limited geographic scale- most schools in the U.S. are likely to operate on a regular school calendar, serving all students who are able to attend. We're calling this Phase 1 – schools operating "business as usual."

However, as the pandemic becomes more widespread, schools may shift into Phase 2, which refers to any kind of reduced services, like a limited school schedule or limiting the number of students or staff who come to school on any given school day. We're calling Phase 2 "reduced operations."

I'd like to start brainstorming with this group about options for increasing the physical distance among students during Phase 1 "business as usual".

In the literature we identified a few school practices that might or might not be feasible to increase the physical distance among students. For example, a principal might alter the class schedule so that the homeroom of children stay together all day without rotating to different teachers or classrooms. Or the principal might stagger class end times so that not all children are congregating in hallways or the cafeteria during meals or transitions.

3) I just named two examples. What other practices that you can think of that could limit the mixing of students/increase the physical distance among students while the school is still in business as usual operations? [Probes below in case participants have trouble coming up with examples]

[Examples if probes are needed]

SD Category	Examples
Reducing density/load in common areas through altered scheduling	Let classes out at different times so fewer students are in the hall at any one time
Suspending use of common areas	Lunch in classrooms rather than in lunch room; no recess
Instituting home room stay	Children remain with one group of children all day and teachers rotate through the room

Increasing space among students during in-person instruction	Move class outdoors; re-arrange desks to increase space; divide classes into smaller groups; require students to remain seated in classroom
Canceling classes or activities that occur during the school day with a high rate of mixing/contract	Cancel P.E.; cancel field trips; cancel choir
Segregating students within common areas	Require that students only eat with classmates in lunchroom; require that students stay in assigned section of school yard
Cancelling or postponing after school activities	Cancel performances, sports practices, or games
Implementing standard workplace social distancing measures for teachers and other staff	Limit face to face meetings; cancel staff meetings
Limiting visitors	Do not allow parents or other visitors; restrict vendor access to school
Reducing mixing during transport	Suspend buses; discourage use of public transportation

4) Let's go through this list one by one. As we do, please keep three things in mind: (1) What kinds of things (resources, time, building requirements, rainy day lesson plans) would need to be in place in order to make it happen at a school? (2) Would it only work for certain types of schools? (3) What are the primary barriers to sustaining this practice for several weeks?

Facilitator fill in table over webinar:

Elicited idea	Elements necessary to make it happen	Relevant for which types of schools	Primary barriers to sustaining for several weeks

[Probe for necessary ingredients: e.g., Rainy day funds to allow for hiring temps. A gym or large space in the building. Expedited criminal background checks of staff. A set of lesson plans that temps/subs could use. Emergency notification systems.]

[Probe for barriers: e.g. insufficient extra adult staff; limited space to spread out in; set bell schedule; multiple schools sharing same building and common spaces; teacher union requirements]

5) Do you have experience with any of the practices that we just went through? Lessons learned from implementing them?

Identification of Practices During Phase 2, Reduced School Operations

In Phase 2, when schools operate on an altered/reduced schedule, we identified some additional potential practices like shortening the school day, or the school week. These altered schedule options can be used with or without distance learning where students receive distance learning.

6) Beyond shortened day, shortened week, and alternating attendance schedules, are there any additional practices that you can think of that could theoretically use to increase the physical distance between students?

[Probes in case participants can't identify additional practices]

SD Category	Examples
Partial closure	Closure of one class; closure of one grade
Reduced schedule	Shorter school week; shorter school day; ½ students attend M-W and ½ attend W-F

7) Let's go through this list one by one. As we do, please keep three things in mind: (1) What kinds of things (resources, time, building requirements, rainy day lesson plans) would need to be in place in order to make it happen at a school? (2) Would it only work for certain types of schools? (3) What are the primary barriers to sustaining this practice for several weeks?

Facilitator fill table over webinar:

Elicited idea	Elements necessary to make it happen	Relevant for which types of schools	Primary barriers to sustaining for several weeks

[Probe for necessary ingredients: e.g., resources, time, building requirements, parents providing transportation, parents taking time off work, lesson plans, distance learning lesson

plans; emergency notification systems; accurate parent contact information; teacher union negotiations about altered pay.]

[Probe for barriers: e.g. cost; bandwidth; computing devices at home; insufficient quality content; regulatory framework for online credit-bearing courses]

8) Have you ever used distance learning in an emergency? Please provide examples

9) Any lessons learned from implementing distance learning in an emergency?

10) What are the barriers to doing larger scale distance learning (i.e., reaching more students for longer duration) in an emergency?

Ranking

11) We're now at our last two questions. We are going to go round robin. When it is your turn, please state your top three most feasible practices (and state why) of any we have discussed today to sustain for several weeks. When considering feasibility consider: do you have the funds, personnel, equipment, space, time, and legal authority/policy requirements?

- Most feasible
- 2nd most feasible
- 3rd most feasible

12) Now, let us go around again, ranking which three you consider the least feasible to sustain for several weeks? Why? (As above, go round robin)

- Least feasible
- Second least feasible
- Third least feasible

13) Okay, given everything we discussed today, is there anything that we didn't ask, and you wish to share regarding this topic?