

## REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

### Background

The first report of a positive COVID-19 case in Connecticut occurred in early March 2020. By the middle of that month, all schools in the state had been ordered to cease in-person education per Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7C. In June 2020, just after the end of the 2019/2020 academic school year, many school districts began planning for how learning would look in the upcoming year.

On June 29, 2020, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) published and distributed their guidance document, *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together*. Each Local Educational Agency (LEA) was encouraged to use that document "as a guide and consult with all relevant stakeholders to determine the best way to proceed consistent with the requirements" (see page 1 of the Adapt, Advance, Achieve document). LEA's were also expected to submit an operations plan to the CSDE addressing the requirements outlined in the Adapt, Advance, Achieve document by July 24, 2020.

With short notice and an all-ready full-plate of tasks to get ready for the upcoming school year, Connecticut school districts showcased an ultimate display of ingenuity to get their schools ready for learning.

### Scenario

The Vernon Public Schools sought the expertise of the District Health and Safety Committee to begin assessing what worked at the end of the previous year and how to incorporate those ideas into their COVID-19 Operations Plan. Ultimately, the overall goals were to:

- Strive to bring students safely back into the classroom;
- Strengthen distance learning capabilities;
- Develop a communication plan for parents and guardians;
- Establish a school liaison for each building; and
- Survey the school community to regularly assess comfort level.

The Committee, led by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph Macary, met weekly to accomplish these goals. Committee representation was inclusive of the district's executive leadership team, as well as administrators, staff, and school climate specialists among each of the district's schools. CIRMA Risk Management also attended the district's meetings to provide additional consultative services in the planning phase. The Department of Public Health (DPH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, Connecticut Executive Orders, CIRMA Risk Management feedback, and CSDE's Adapt, Advance, Achieve guidebook formed the foundation of these discussions.

### CIRMA/Member Partnership

CIRMA Risk Management was involved in the meetings of the Vernon Public School District Health and Safety Committee to provide additional thoughts and guidance when appropriate. Throughout the month of July, the Committee was able to identify various pain points and process inefficiencies, assess how their current facilities, technologies and systems would handle the pandemic in the short- and long-term, and implement policies and procedures to manage their risk. Not only did the Vernon Public Schools submit their COVID-19 Operations Plan by the July 24, 2020 deadline, they also were able to start school on schedule using a Hybrid Plan. Students attended in-person lessons at school in cohorts two days a week and had one day a week with virtual learning. On the other two days, students had assignments and academic tasks to complete virtually for their classes. Families also had the option for their children to receive virtual (remote 5 days) learning in lieu of this plan.

Key areas where CIRMA Risk Management provided insight included, but was not limited to, ensuring the proper acquisition and distribution of personal protective equipment for staff and students, understanding the training needs for bringing the school community safely back into the facilities, and the elements of developing a complete and comprehensive

## **CIRMA/Member Partnership** - *continued*

communication plan to the school community. CIRMA Risk Management continues to be a partner in the school's efforts to manage risk and stays committed to assisting Connecticut's school districts in maintaining and safety of their employees and school community.

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Please visit our training and education program page at [CIRMA.org](http://CIRMA.org) for our current training schedule.