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August 26, 2020

TO: District Superintendents, School Building Leaders, Nonpublic School Leaders, Charter School Leaders

From: Christina Coughlin, Assistant Commissioner

Re: **COVID 19 Reopening Guidance – Facilities Clarifications**

The attached five Questions & Answers are intended to provide clarification to the Facilities Mandatory Requirements outlined on pages 46 thru 54 of the [NYSED School Reopening Guidance](#).

The attached Q & A's also respond to the [Office of Facilities Planning's \(OFP\) August 5, 2020 COVID FAQ](#) document.

In response to concerns NYSED received from district administrators related to the requirements set for facilities found in the two documents noted above we have revised the guidance as indicated in the five points listed in the document.

The five changes/clarifications are as follows:

1. **Architects' Stamps:** We clarified that there is no requirement for a design professional to certify and sign and seal the submitted floor plan.
2. **Technical Assistance:** School administrators are encouraged to call the Office of Facilities Planning with any questions regarding facilities issues as school reopening plans are developed. Technical assistance does not require that a project be in process with the Department; we want to assist our colleagues in districts during these challenging times.
3. **Transparent Sneeze Guards:** The requirements for sneeze guards/separators remain as issued in the July 28 guidance (Titled: Light Transmitting Plastic Sneeze Guards or Separators). Because these are useful strategies for separating spaces/individuals, many districts have been interested in their use. However, they can be flammable in certain circumstances. Seeking to balance the risks in these unusual times, we have requested advice from the NYS Department of State, which promulgates the fire code. We expect further guidance from the Department of State shortly and will update our guidance at that time.
4. **Desk Separation:** Measurements to facilitate social distancing in classrooms have been clarified and revised to conform with the DOH distance of at least six feet between persons.
5. **Hallway Doors:** While OFP policy requires all corridor doors to remain closed at all times to slow the potential spread of fire, we are making a temporary change for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. This temporary measure will allow doors without automatic door

closers to be left open - to improve ventilation and reduce contact with door handles to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We are grateful for the thoughtful feedback we received from the field on these issues. Navigating this new environment, while continue to address continuing risks, is challenging for all of us. The collegial process was followed by extensive internal review. It has resulted in these new requirements and clarifications. We believe they will aid the districts in finalizing their reopening plans and help to facilitate the mitigation of the effects of COVID-19.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Office of Facilities Planning at 518-474-3906.

**Office of Facilities Planning, New York State Education Department August 17, 2020
COVID-19 Reopening Guidance – Facilities Issues Clarifications**

1. **Is an architect's stamp necessary for Repurposing Plans?** Repurposing of an existing space is addressed in the FAQ Document recently posted on our web page. Question No. 3 is clarified below. Repurposing involves adding student desks/chairs to gymnasiums, cafeterias and large school spaces to create additional classroom space for social distancing. **These changes to room function should be designed in consultation with your design professional but do not require a design professional's stamp and signature.**

FAQ No.3 (Revised)

What is the process for Repurposing of Existing Rooms associated with the COVID Reopening?

Repurposing of Rooms includes changing the configuration of the room furniture by adding, removing or relocating furniture (desks, tables, chairs, shelving) or casework to accommodate a change in function or use. The furniture layout needs to be done in consultation with a design professional to ensure that existing exits are not obstructed and new code compliant egress access aisles are provided between desks, tables, chairs and other furniture.

- For smaller spaces (such as, but not limited to, classrooms) this means removing and/or relocating furniture and equipment in the space to promote social distancing. If reduction in class size is planned the layouts of desks should follow social distancing guidelines but floor plans need not be submitted.
- For larger assembly spaces (such as cafeterias, gyms, cafetorium's, multi-purpose rooms and other large spaces), this means adding desks, chairs, teaching consoles, tables and temporary partitions to the space to create additional teaching space, office space, etc. within the larger assembly space. The layouts of these spaces should follow social distancing guidelines.

Floor plans of repurposed rooms of larger assembly spaces only, shall be incorporated into the Reopening Plans required to be posted on the district's website. Floor plans are not required to be submitted directly to the Office of Facilities Planning (OFP) for buildings which utilize repurposed rooms.

The floor plans for repurposed spaces shall include the following:

- Brief description of proposed changes
- Graphic scale
- Seating and furniture layout, temporary partitions
- Existing furnishings and fixtures to remain
- Area and occupant loads
- Exit door locations and exit capacity
- Exit sign locations
- Description of any changes to HVAC, plumbing, electrical/lighting or fire alarm systems

2. **Technical Assistance:** District Administrators are encouraged to call the Office of Facilities Planning (OFP) 518 474 3906, with any questions regarding changes to facilities including but not limited to: alterations, new buildings, leased modular and tents, leased spaces, repurposing space, sneeze guards, mechanical, electrical & plumbing equipment and COVID-19 submission requirements.

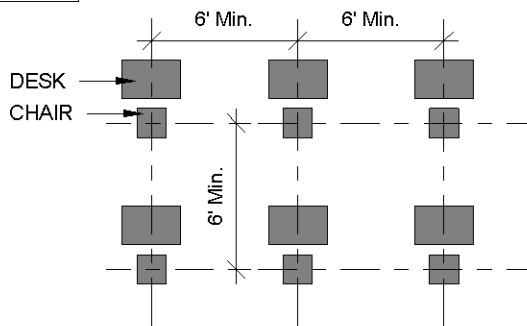
3. **Sneeze Guards:** The guidance Titled, “Light Transmitting Plastic Sneeze Guards or Separators,” dated July 28, 2020, is posted on the OFP website. We are continuing discussions with the Department of State’s Division of Building Standards & Codes (DOS) about possible changes to the document. Until the DOS has directed SED to revise our Guidance the requirements found therein still apply.

4. **FAQ No.11 (Revised)**

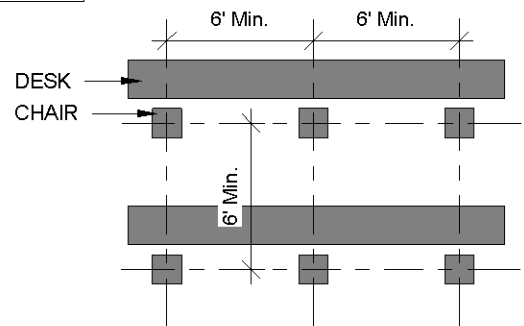
Where do we take measurements from to establish social distancing; for example in the layout of furniture/equipment/etc.?

To achieve acceptable social distancing between the occupants of classroom desks, chairs and teaching consoles, establish a minimum of 6' separation measured to the centerline of individual's space. Measurements should be taken in a manner consistent with the example diagrams below.

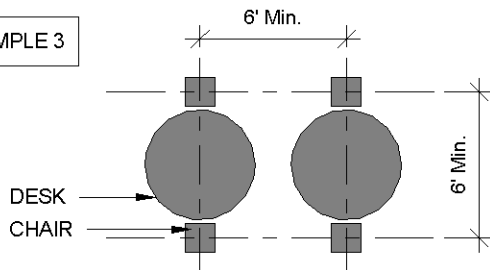
EXAMPLE 1



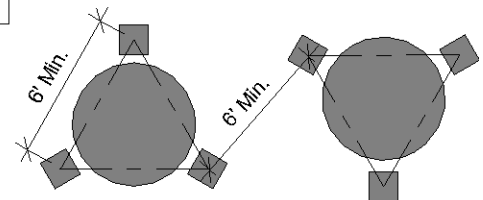
EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



5. FAQ No.15 (Revised)

If classroom doors are not fire rated and do not have door closers or automatic hold opens, NYSED Re-Opening Guidance states “doors may be fixed in the open position”. Our fire safety inspector states “Doors opening onto a corridor are required to be maintained closed” per MPS S105-1(b) and the School Security and Door Hardening memo issued by NYSED on March 5th, 2019. Please advise.

On page 48 of the Re-Opening Guidance it states that “to reduce the spread of virus from touching door levers and knobs, doors may be fixed in the open position. This is only permitted at doors without door closers and doors which are not fire rated.” Although this statement differs from NYSED policy that all corridor doors remain closed at all times to prevent the spread of smoke and fire, to temporarily address the risks of contracting the COVID 19 virus we are permitting doors which do not have closers or are not fire rated to be left in the open position. Staff should be directed to manually close the door following room evacuation during a fire situation.