Action Steps for Schools during a Severe Pandemic

In this case, severe refers to the severity of the illness in a geographic area, not how widespread it is or how many cases there are. Severity will initially be determined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), but on local (Oakland County) basis, Oakland County Health Department (OCHD) will make that determination.

The following information is based on CDC recommendations that have been reviewed by the Oakland County Health Division and the H1N1 subcommittee of the Oakland County Superintendents Association (OCSA).

Extend the time sick students, teachers or staff stay home for at least 7 days, even if they feel better sooner. Those who are still sick after 7 days should continue to stay home until at least 24 hours after symptoms have gone away. This has now been revised by the CDC. The new recommendation is simply that students and staff should remain home until at least 24 hours after the fever disappears without the aid of fever-reducing medication. Staff can use sick days, sick bank, short-term disability, or unpaid leave.

Allow high-risk students, teachers, and staff to stay home. These students, staff and teachers should make this decision in consultation with their physician and/or health professional. During a confirmed "severe" outbreak, immune compromised staff, students and teachers should consult with their physicians to determine best course of action to protect themselves including home isolation.

Conduct active fever and symptom screening of students, teachers, and staff upon arrival at school. Any sick students, teachers or staff should be separated from others, offered a surgical mask and sent home. Meet with unions to forewarn them and seek cooperation. However, we retain the right to send home anyone sick. Recommend that parents be notified now to make alternative child care arrangements for their children in case needed. May want to organize as follows: staff reports to principal upon arrival, principal checks for apparent flu symptoms. Teachers survey children for apparent flu symptoms upon their arrival in class in the morning, then again after lunch.
Find ways to increase social distances at school such as rotating teachers between classrooms while keeping some groups of students in one classroom, moving desks farther apart, or postponing class trips. Refunds for field trips could be a problem—make sure that they can be re-scheduled or fees refunded, or warn parents on permission slips that fees are non-refundable in the event of cancellation. Move desks as far apart as possible. May need to cancel dances, fun nights, even athletic events if OCHD declares an outbreak “severe.” Each league with county affiliations should deal with this now—principle: if one school cancels, all do. This will make sense as well since an OCHD declaration of “severe” will likely be countywide.

Consider how and when to dismiss students by working closely with your local and state public health officials. If you decide to dismiss all students, notify CDC and your state [and county] health and education agency by reporting a school or school district dismissal. OCHD will work with school districts to help determine when this is appropriate—there is no fixed rule. MDE confirms that “illness days” may count toward the 30 allowable hours that can be considered against the 1,098-hour requirement. MDE recommends reserving days now that can be converted from non-instructional days to instructional days in the event that the 30 hours are exceeded. Check how many hours above 1,098 your district and each school or level has. The number of days are not critical; meeting the number of hours is. Seek the advice of your pupil accounting staff. If school is in session with fewer than 75% of students in attendance, day must be made up and teachers will likely demand an extra day of pay.

Develop options for how schoolwork can be continued at home if school is dismissed or your students are home because someone in their house is sick. For individual students, can use Moodle/Blackboard, email with teachers, etc. Oakland Schools has been asked to produce web-based generic content by grade by subject that all students can use. The purpose of this is to keep students engaged, not to keep them up to date with their exact assignments, and is for use when entire schools are closed. Considered having teachers provide content when schools are closed, but realized that they would request pay for doing so, and if days must be made up, would have to pay them again.

OCHD also recommends that desks and bus seats be cleaned with disinfectant wipes between each change of students.