Safe entry for students and staff during a pandemic

A concrete plan for risk mitigation

School districts, colleges, and universities across the United States face the evolving challenge of how to educate students in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. So far, some remained safe while others have not been as fortunate, experiencing outbreaks necessitating modifications or cancellations.

Unfortunately, practical guidance on how to safely reopen has been scarce, leading to a patchwork quilt of solutions, plans, and remediation efforts. But with an uncertain timetable for a vaccine and **experts predicting that new pandemics** will be an ongoing concern in the future, schools and colleges need to find a solution that will allow them to continue to fulfill their mission of on-campus learning as safely as possible—no matter what the world throws at them.

Thankfully, **CrisisGo, an AWS Advanced Tier Technology Partner** who holds a **AWS Education Competency,** can help. Leveraging their expertise helping schools across the country use technology to improve safety, CrisisGo jumped into action in April 2020. They surveyed more than 200 school leaders throughout the country on issues related to COVID-19, challenges experienced in the spring, and expected difficulties for returning to school in the fall. Their team analyzed the responses, combining the data with recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), state health agencies, and state task force guidelines. They completed a standardized approach to how schools and colleges can physically admit students and staff back to school in the safest way possible while identifying and responding to any outbreaks in real time. CrisisGo calls this the **Standard School Entry Method.** Read below to review the steps of the method, along with ways to mitigate risk.

Standard school entry method: Step-by-step

Based on their research, CrisisGo concluded that the process of safely getting students into school each day requires three important steps. Modify the process slightly for the entry of staff, as well.

01. Pre-certified entry reports

As a first screening step, each student or staff member should submit a pre-certification, or health survey, completed each day (by a parent or guardian, in the case of students) prior to their departure for school. You can distribute and collect this survey through a variety of means, including email, online forms, or smartphone applications.

02. Staff-supported entry points

The second screening step involves admitting students and personnel physically into a school building, which requires trained staff. After they reach the campus, dormitory, school, or other institutional facility, you will move students and personnel quickly through stations staffed with the following roles:

a. A **social distance promoter** funnels entrants while helping them maintain social distancing and ensuring that students have appropriate PPE.

b. A **greeter** might ask, “Have you completed the survey?” before directing students to the appropriate screening station.

c. Multiple **screeners** situated at separate stations will verify students’ pre-certified entries by scanning a smartphone or student ID badge or help students complete a certification for those who did not.

d. A **temperature taker** validates entry with an additional, objective measure by verifying the entrant does not have an elevated temperature.

e. A **secondary screener** separately handles any entrant who has additional information or health/certification issues.

By carefully employing steps one and two and noting both symptoms and risk factors to differentiate between COVID-19 and regular flu symptoms, the vast majority of unhealthy or ineligible students and staff should never enter the building or campus at all.

03. Data collection and analysis

So far, the screening process enabled a rapid and uniform determination of whether someone is able to enter the building safely. Simply excluding entry, however, does not solve the complete problem. For example:

- Are at-risk students/staff going into quarantine?
- Were they tested? If so, did they test positive?
- Are they under a doctor's care?
- When are they planning to return?

A powerful secondary benefit of the screening in steps one and two lies in the ability to collect and analyze data for trend monitoring, contact tracing, and making informed decisions. Being able to see where a student was on campus in terms of classes, programs, athletics, clubs, shared facilities, and more puts invaluable information in the hands of administrators. Now, leadership can make informed decisions to contain the spread, such as bringing in a substitute teacher, canceling or combining classes, or even sending an entire grade home. By entering the data into the system, you complete the picture that drives decisions beyond the individual student or staff member.

Remember that any data-collection method must follow regulations and best practices around data security. By employing permissions for system access and only collecting data outlined as necessary by the CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), schools can maintain safe working conditions without putting student and staff information at risk.

Working through barriers

Now you know what a robust safe-entry program entails, but implementing the Standard School Entry Method requires working with multiple stakeholders, addressing concerns, and preparing for obstacles. Let's take a look at a few of the common barriers.

01. Parent/guardian involvement

Achieving the buy-in of the parent and guardian population engages the most important first line of defense. By doing so, you safeguard the quality of pre-certification survey responses. It's critical to communicate to families the importance of their role in keeping all students safe and allowing schools to remain open. While change can be difficult, parents have always been the frontline in determining their own child's health and wellbeing. Soon the task will feel as commonplace as preparing breakfast or getting to the bus stop on time.

While parents and guardians hold a vital role in the safe school entry, some may not understand the task or appreciate the level of responsibility. This risk highlights the importance of using two steps in the screening process: both verification and validation. Without screeners attentive to symptoms and the objective measure of taking temperatures, compliance may degrade quickly. Keeping the routine simple is key; in any system that is too complicated, compliance degrades rapidly as soon as it encounters even small obstacles.

02. Teacher and staff concerns

As you introduce teachers and staff to the process, many will ask questions from a place of anxiety. Open communication and information about the new system is critical. Since it's natural to be concerned about personal safety, there may be a push for a 100% requirement of proof that staff members will not be exposed. Be transparent about the fact that 100% safety is an impossible bar, just as it was before the pandemic. Give complete information and explain the system fully, including what will happen in the event of a sick student or staff member. Additionally, offer time for feedback and questions to help the entire staff feel more comfortable and confident about the process.

Lisle High School: Fighting COVID-19 with communication

At Lisle High School, staff use CrisisGo's Safety iPass to ensure quick, safe entry into the building and improve communication between parents and administrators. Some benefits include:

Only 15 minutes required for staff to get hybrid in-person students into the building each day

Daily reports for easy contact-tracing can be shared with local health department

Daily and weekly reports for families to ease fear and improve transparency

03. Becoming comfortable with some risk

When it comes to infections and exposures, colleges and school districts should maintain a mentality of "not if, but when." Exposure during a pandemic is likely to happen and maintaining this realistic mindset will allow for calm and purposeful planning ahead of time. Note that planning should not only include what you'll do if an exposure or outbreak occurs and how a shutdown (or partial shutdown) will proceed but also how you will know when it's time to safely reopen.

Another important consideration in terms of barriers is to take into account the risks of the other options at your disposal, including a manual process or, worse yet, no process at all. The numbers simply do not support conducting full, manual screenings of all students as they arrive. Even at only a minute or two per student, delays would run into hours when multiplied by the numbers of students needing to pass through a limited number of staff

screeners. Claiming that it's simply not feasible and implementing an ineffective system—or no system—is irresponsible at best.

Utilizing the Safe Standard Entry Method process allows school districts to implement a research-based approach that considers risk. When a student or staff member is exposed, the data from your recordkeeping allows for pivoting and taking appropriate, pinpointed steps to limit potential exposure.

04. Knowing when and how to shut down

In order to make decisions around level of response, having accurate data readily available is essential. How big is the outbreak? Which classes did the student attend? If you employ the Safe Standard Entry Method, your records will help determine the level of response, reducing the chance of the entire district needing to shut down.

Based on the data, for example, a district could take a position such as, "At this high school, we're having a large infection rate, so let's shut that down. But all of the elementary schools show no infection, so we can keep them operating while also implementing further screenings for younger students who have high school siblings." Having accurate and real-time data enables pinpoint accuracy in selecting courses of action, rather than broad brushstroke measures with their associated collateral costs.

Moving forward with safety

Schools play a critical role in our communities and opening them up is key to getting our economy running. But bringing students and staff back to school and campus safely and efficiently—and knowing when and how to shut down—requires a research-based system, along with careful data gathering and recordkeeping. CrisisGo's **Standard School Entry Method** helps bring clarity and security to an uncertain time. With CrisisGo's Safety iPass, schools can take their system to an even more efficient and effective level, admitting students, staff, and visitors via a pre-certified digital badge to confirm that every person is safe to return. Similar to a fast pass for airports and other services, Safety iPass speeds up the ability to confirm the safety status of students and staff and get them into a safe learning environment.

CrisisGo's Safety iPass is built on the Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud to provide a safe and secure connection for all users. Because our service is critical for school safety, we work with AWS to offer customers a fast, reliable hosting platform with security protection to ensure student and staff data remains secure. AWS offers superior scalability and reliable uptime, so your services are always ready when you need them.

For more information on how CrisisGo can help your school, college, or institution, visit safetyipass.crisisgo.com/safetyipass.

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