

U.S. Municipal Bond Market

Local Schools on the Road to Reopening in Fall 2020

Fall 2020 School Related Announcements: Virginia, Texas, California, New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts – Others Likely Soon to Follow

It is only the second week of June, and in a traditional year many primary and secondary schools would have just completed the school year or would be just wrapping up instruction and final exams. Not this year; not in the New COVID-19 Normal. Remote classes, virtual graduations, and questions about what fall 2020 holds are much of what is on the minds of students, parents, educators, and others interested in what may come next.

State and local governments have been in the process of lifting stay-at-home or shelter-in-place guidance in recent days and weeks, and the process of reopening typical day-to-day interactions is somewhat occurring. All the while, lawmakers and institutional leaders have been weighing the pros and cons of allowing education at different levels to return to classrooms. Just as the nationwide reopening has been occurring in a patchwork fashion, it is likely that guidance about how and when schools can return to in-person instruction will occur in a similar way.

Schools reopening for in-person instruction has many positive social and financial benefits. Remote learning offers a brief but inadequate substitute, and getting kids back to school will help parents on the employment front because they will have more certainty about their children's schedules. There are developments causing us to become more optimistic about the potential for schools to return to in-person instruction come this fall.

Virginia Schools Able to Reopen In-Person Fall 2020

On Tuesday this week, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, who prior to entering politics was a U.S. Army medical officer and pediatric neurologist, announced that schools will be able to reopen for in-person instruction in the fall of 2020. Virginia will be using a three-phase approach and instruction delivery and operations will be modified to enhance safety.¹

Texas: In-Person for Summer, Working on In-Person Plan for Fall 2020

In the middle of May, Texas announced that in-person summer instruction could occur with safety precautions in place, such as classroom limits and temperature checks. State guidance is not a mandate, as local schools have the authority to decide how to handle their own situations.² Currently, the governor is working on a plan with the education commissioner on strategies for opening Texas schools for in-person instruction in the fall.³

California Schools Will Make Their Own Decisions

This week, the California Department of Education released a 62-page guidebook ([Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California's Public Schools](#)) offering local school districts a blueprint of how they can safely open schools to in-person instruction in fall 2020. Each California district can decide if and when they should open and can use this manual as guidance. The manual includes safety protocols and classroom organization strategies, among other recommendations and requirements.⁴

Please see disclosure starting on page 3.

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New York Likely to Wait Until Closer to the Beginning of the School Year

New York City (NYC) began its reopening just this week. Back at the end of May, NYC mayor Bill de Blasio said that opening all school buildings for fall 2020 is “Plan A,” but he also said the city will wait until closer to the beginning of the school year to make a decision about reopening NYC schools.⁵

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Rhode Island Goal to Reopen Public Schools Aug. 31

Wednesday, Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo said she is confident schools will be ready to open in the fall. The state’s Department of Education is currently developing guidance and safety standards for schools to follow. The governor is allocating \$42 million of CARES Act money for schools to implement any related safety precautionary measures.⁶

Massachusetts Guidance for Reopening Schools

At the end of last week, Massachusetts released state guidance for schools to follow when they begin reopening in the fall. Students will need to be in small groups, and safety procedures are comprehensive.⁷ The Boston Public Schools superintendent cited increased complications with logistics and the costs of the guidance as key concerns going forward.⁸

Summary

These announcements reinforce the trend that some of the U.S. is trying to regain its routine (as modified as it may be) and is trying to return to the road to normalcy – this despite the uncertainty of what the near-term looks like or when normal will be reached.

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All the while, concern a second coronavirus wave is emerging has developed because of recently reported spikes in positive cases in Arizona, Texas, Florida, and California.⁹ To add context, this morning Dr. Scott Gottlieb said, “It’s not a second wave” about new coronavirus cases in states like Arizona and Texas. “They never really got rid of the first wave.”¹⁰

This divergence or interpretation of circumstance, differing opinions, and how they inform decision-making illustrates the conundrum currently facing policymakers. It seems there are still financial- and health-related consequences that need to be anticipated and measured going forward. The road to normalcy may not be as straight as some have hoped.

¹ Lee, Alicia; [Virginia governor announces state plans for reopening in the fall](#); CNN; June 9, 2020.

² Carpenter, Jacob and Shelby Webb; [Texas Schools can re-open for summer classes under ‘safe distancing practices’](#); Houston Chronicle; May 18, 2020.

³ Wiley, Elizabeth; [They should be able to return to classrooms’: Gov Abbott on plans for schools in August](#); WFAA, 8ABC, May 22, 2020.

⁴ Crowley, Kerry; [Coronavirus: California Department of Education releases guidance for reopening schools](#); the Mercury News; June 9, 2020.

⁵ Durkin, Erin; [De Blasio considering options if schools are unsafe in September](#); Politico; May 18, 2020.

⁶ Sherman, Eli; [RI Schools will reopen Aug. 31, Viola Davis to address grads; 66 cases, 4 deaths](#); 12WPRI.com; June 10, 2020.

⁷ MacNeill, Arianna; [Smaller classes, masks, and desks 6 feet apart: State officials release some guidelines for reopening schools](#); Boston.com; June 8, 2020.

⁸ Dwyer, Dialynn; [Boston Public Schools superintendent says implementing reopening guidelines ‘incredibly expensive’](#); Boston.com; June 10, 2020.

⁹ Court, Emma and David R Baker; [Second U.S. Virus Wave Emerges as Cases Top 2 Million](#); Bloomberg; June 10, 2020.

¹⁰ [Former FDA Chief Scott Gottlieb on what’s driving the COVID-19 spikes in some states](#); CNBC - video; June 11, 2020.

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