

Reopening 2020

Whether your school building reopens in May or August is out of your hands for the most part. It is certainly in God's hands. School leader Bill McGee writes about this so well in his recent article- [Don't Waste This Pandemic](#).

You may be like me and want to be pro-active and not reactive. So, could I provide 12 questions in Part I? The answers would help you plan now so that your school reopens well. In Part II, I suggest 7 actions, that also need taken now, that will allow you to help the school accelerate into a preferred future.

I do admit a couple of things up front:

The tyranny of the urgent can be all consuming. From talking to school leaders, many are to the point where remote learning is happening quite nicely (or at least happening!). They have time to think.

Your goal should not just be to get back to normal. If it is and you succeed, you will have missed a great opportunity. There is an expectation that things will be different in the future, and the future will be a "new normal." Many people, organizations, and governments expect things to be different as illustrated by the article: [Schools Will Look Very Different When They Reopen](#) (says the California Governor). So, the question is whether we want to just let the new normal happen to us, or do we want to be intentional and proactive in shaping the new normal. Winston Churchill said: "Never waste a good crisis." We may never have an opportunity like this again to craft a new normal for our schools.

Part I- 12 Questions to help plan a successful Reopening

1. Could you pull together a task force to plan for the reopening? This would include representatives of all stakeholders (all those impacted by the reopening). Give them a clear mandate to have a plan ready for May if that is still a possibility, one for August or one for even later. They would be forward looking and not deal with the current concerns. They could collaborate with or learn from similar schools.
2. If the government or parents demand social distancing, how would you cut class sizes (think students coming to school at different times or some online classes as an option)? How would you handle arrival, assemblies, meals, recess, dismissal and after school care?
3. How we you ensure health of students and staff? Will staff and students have their temperature scanned prior to coming in the building? Do we need to hire increased nursing staff to start?
4. What PPE (personal protective equipment) must be ordered and required to be worn?
5. Do you need to maintain the typical calendar or school day?
6. What adjustments need made to after school activities?
7. What is the plan to sterilize and sanitize the building (busses?) before school reopens, during the school day and then after each day ends?
8. How can you leverage this crisis for spiritual growth during the coming year? What theme could you have that builds on the experiences of this crisis?
9. Who will be trained and ready to deal with emotional needs that staff or students may bring back to the campus?
10. How will teachers assess the starting place academically of their students? What guidelines will they be given that change the physical and academic plans they have made in the past?
11. What training do students and teachers need to ensure safety?
12. What volunteers are needed to help make these plans work and how will they be recruited and trained?

In Part II, I suggest 7 actions, that also need taken now, that will allow you to help the school accelerate into a preferred future.

1. Communication needs to increase (and I know you have been doing a lot). Education can be obtained many places today. What makes your school special is likely the community feeling and the relationships that cannot be found elsewhere. So, leverage that with varied and planned communications that differ by audience. Who is calling the Students? Parents? Donors? Teachers? What videos have been produced? It must have been encouraging when administrators at one Christian school delivered pizzas to teacher homes (and maintained social distance and used plastic gloves). Have you had a Zoom meeting with parents where they can ask questions?
2. Fund Raising (or friend raising). This can be an opportune time to raise funds. Convincing donors of the need should be easier than ever. A recent non-attender dropped off a \$200,000 check at our church door last week since he assumed a need. Donors are more available to consider needs. There are those severely financially effected by the pandemic and we want to help or empathize with them. Many donors have not been economically impacted (some may have prospered) during this pandemic. Changes in how we raise funds need to be made as [this article](#) illustrates. This is the time to lay out a systematic, aggressive plan to friend raise and fund raise.
3. Appoint a high-powered group to consider/implement changes in how you offer education. As a leader told me this week, their strategic plan that included educational changes has been accelerated by this crisis.

- a. That school is now looking at how carefully planned online courses can help them accomplish their mission (and save money). Dr. Jay Ferguson, the Head of School of Grace Community School in Tyler, Texas [recently said](#): "Every Christian school in the U.S. that sees remaining in business as part of its future has converted, or is converting, to some form of virtual schooling." Could a hybrid offering of online and face to face classes be a win-win-win for students,

teachers,
and the
school?

Jay goes on to say: "I read an excellent article the other day, called *Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization is Now a Startup*. In the article, Andy Crouch and others noted that, for non-profits (and, presumably, for-profit businesses, too) COVID-19 is not just a "blizzard"- a small storm to hunker down and get through, only to climb out and get back to business as usual. Instead, the precipitous fall of the economy and uncertain future of the virus has created a 12 to 18 month "mini ice age," which will fundamentally change how non-profits do business."

- b. Families have gotten used to flexible learning that lets them choose where and when they learn. How can your school offer some elements of that? Does every student in a high school math class need to be on the same page at the same time?
- c. What elements of remote learning do teachers and students want to maintain?
- d. Is this the time to think about a [university model](#) school where classes are offered certain days? Could it be on the same campus with a "normal" school?

- e. How can deeper learning and problem-based learning take a step forward? The book [Mind Shift](#) offers these and other practical ideas.
 - f. What are dreams and hopes for change that you or others at your school have had? This may be the best time to consider and adopt a few of them.
4. Changes in how we retain students. Using data, you need to offer what current families want. This may have changed during the crisis or [it may be what recent research has shown](#). We do need to offer excellent remote learning now so parents see the obvious difference from what local options are offering. Students need to feel engaged, appreciated and yes, even loved!
 5. Have a small, talented group work on changes in how we recruit students. This crisis represents an extraordinary time when parents that have not previously chosen Christian Schools may look at new options for their children. The options they have chosen may have let them down in this crisis. There need to be marketing changes to reach them so they know of the great local option they may have missed thus far. Go after past families that may have left and found the grass was not greener.
 6. Some schools need to be changing their financial models. This may be the most challenging but also offer the most needed change and most opportunity. Can we look at new financial models? Let's lay out a 5 year plan to get teacher/staff salaries at a respectable level that is funded by tuition. This is the time to develop several financial models that can offer choices when we are confronted with a reality in the coming months. These would all need to support a flourishing school.
 7. What short or long-term maintenance could be done now while the students and teachers are gone? Might contractors need work and provide bids that allow the school to do more than had been planned?

Conclusion:

If the NBA has created a [25-day return-to-basketball plan](#), couldn't/shouldn't we start planning now for what is to come? Maybe I should ask it differently—We have a pandemic that we obviously did not create. Shouldn't we look for the opportunity in this crisis?

Dr. R. Mark Beadle has served Christian schools for 35 years as a Teacher, Principal and Head of School. He is an adjunct for Liberty, Columbia International and Indiana Wesleyan University. He is the Head of School Emeritus for Sevenstar. He wants Christian schools and leaders to flourish during and after the crisis.