

Ten Things to do NOW to get your School Ready for Students in a COVID-19 World

A collaboration between the American Restroom Association and Project CLEAN.



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Association**



Background

“Handwashing involves five simple and effective steps (Wet, Lather, Scrub, Rinse, Dry) and helps prevent illness so you can stay healthy.” - CDC

Imagine a typical local middle school, which houses just over 900 sixth-to-eighth graders, was built in 1956, with a new wing and a standalone physical education building constructed in 1975, plus since 1985 a new media center.

Consider a typical four-year high school constructed in 1976 and renovated in 2000 that is home to 1,050 students.

Now try to visualize the sets of students’ restrooms in the main hall of a middle or junior high school, those near the cafeteria, and positioned in three other academic wings, in the locker room, or in the front area of a standalone gym.

How will these secondary public school restrooms function in a post COVID-19 world?

This article concentrates on our country’s 32,294 middle and high schools and their restrooms for 11-18 year-old students. These spaces are historically either nice or nasty.

For the last twenty-five years in Georgia and 20 other states, as well as in Germany and several other countries, **Project CLEAN** has worked with caring educators, students, custodians, administrators, and parents so that all school restrooms - especially in middle and high schools - would be clean, sanitary, and well-stocked.

Whenever the coronavirus pandemic subsides or ends and all children return to their schools, what do we want these restrooms to be like a month or several months after school begins again?

How students and adults should act in your actual buildings is very real and doable. These considerations may seem simple, but they are all necessary! Either we will make these restroom adjustments in our school practices, or we will rhetorically clutter our

schools with more verbiage about school climate and culture and avoid the practical work on sanitation and citizenship.

Each of these suggestions has been implemented in actual schools. These recommendations are not about flattening the curve or the wave. They are about strengthening the will to improve the experience of middle and high school restrooms.

1 – Don't run out of Soap!

There should be soap in each restroom all day and custodians should restock at 6 a.m. and 11 a.m., and 2 p.m. and 6 p.m., if there are night games and activities.

2 – Don't run out of Water!

Every sink should flow with warm or at least cold water.

3 – Don't run out of Paper Towels!

Every restroom should have hand drying towels (preferred) or automatic dryers or both. Towels should be restocked as above or whenever necessary.

4 – Remind, Remind, and Remind

At a minimum, signs made by students with help from art and health teachers, should be messages about flushing, washing hands, and stashing trash. Custodians and administrators should install these signs and set up a vandalism account if necessary.

5 – Check, Check, and Re-Check

An assigned assistant principal should walk the building daily and thoroughly look into both gender's restrooms to ensure they are supplied, clean, and functioning.

6 – Activate Student Leaders

Every student government and class officers should meet and discuss how to work with fellow students to foster more respect for custodians and restrooms.

7 - Make It Fun

Contests: Since most middle and high school students do not sing "Happy Birthday," or recite their "ABCs" when they hurriedly wash their hands after using the restroom, the school district should sponsor school contests such as composing a song for 20-second hand washing supported by business-in-education partners.

8 – Leverage Parent Leaders

Each PTA, PTO, or PTSA should establish a Building and Grounds subcommittee on “school restrooms” to address each schools needs and to engage parents in the home-and-school issues of sanitation and citizenship.

9 – Re-direct Vending Revenue

Ten percent of the proceeds from school vending machines should go for sanitizer stations to be positioned throughout the gym, lobbies, fields, and cafeteria.

10 – Start with Orientation

During orientation, every fifth grader should have a session about expectations concerning restrooms in their next school. When those students physically enter middle school, they should be reoriented with the same expectation, including what consequences will befall both positive and negative behavior.

About the Author: Tom Keating, Ph.D., is the coordinator and founder of Project CLEAN, and has been an advocate for better school restrooms since 1995. His career as classroom teacher, school district lobbyist, school board member, and author spans forty-five years. He serves as a Board Member for the American Restroom Association.

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