

COVID 19: THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

The start of the 2020-2021 school year has presented a whole host of novel issues for school districts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have been presented with a variety of new challenges to ensure a safe environment for all: the implementation of virtual learning programs; accommodating staffing needs; and the development and implementation of a rigorous health and safety plan. When navigating through these issues, the following should be considered:

- **EMPLOYEE LEAVE:** There are several laws that may apply to an employee leave request, including the recently enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Depending on the reason leave is requested, an employee may be entitled to rights afforded by one or more of these laws. Additionally, an applicable collective bargaining agreement should be examined, in order to determine whether it affords an employee with leave in the particular situation.

- **VIRTUAL LEARNING:** Due to the advanced technology employed in schools, school districts have been able to implement virtual learning programs, enabling students and teachers to participate in class remotely. This can involve the live-streaming of classes. However, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act continues to apply in this virtual setting, and student privacy requirements should be considered and adhered to.

- **PHYSICAL OPERATIONS:** Federal, state and local agencies have provided guidance on safety measures to be taken when in-person operations resume. Guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, when addressing issues involving prevention and reaction to COVID-19 in a physical setting.

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As a solicitor, Emily has extensive experience in all facets of local government and school law. Her expertise in reviewing and responding to requests for public records under Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know Law, as well as handling their appeals, for example, has made her a primary go-to for the firm's school and municipal clients.