Teaching Dance in Fall 2020

Questions and Potential Practices from NDEO Members



National Dance Education Organization

www.ndeo.org

As we look toward the Fall of 2020, the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) has been facilitating online discussions about if, and how, dance teachers and students can safely return to their school and studios during this Covid-19 pandemic. These discussions were held via a series of ongoing Virtual Special Interest Group (SIG) Meetings and 16 webinars featuring NDEO member panelists and invited guests.

This document summarizes the questions and potential practices raised by NDEO members and panelists during these meetings and webinars. In particular, the content is largely drawn from two sessions focused on a potential return to the studio in the fall 2020: The NDEO Cross-Sector Brainstorm SIG meeting on May 14, 2020 and "College Dance and The Fall Semester," a webinar hosted on May 20, 2020.

In these sessions, NDEO members and panelists considered the following:

1. **What promising practices can be identified regarding online dance instruction for all ages, skill levels, abilities, and learning environments?**
2. **How can we successfully approach blended learning options, with a combination of online and in-person instruction?**
3. **Given the available information about transmission of the novel coronavirus, what modifications will need to be made to ensure the safety of students and faculty when we return to in-person instruction?**

Our discussions are framed by our mission to "**Advance dance education centered in the arts,"** and our vision of "**Dance education for all**." We believe that dance education is essential because of the value it provides to students' physical, social, cognitive, and emotional health.

Yet, there are health and safety concerns that are unique to the teaching of dance technique and other studio courses. While these concerns must be addressed, we must not allow them to be used as rationale to cut dance programs or close studios. **With safety as our primary focus, we must continue to advocate for and support dance education in all sectors.**

This document outlines some key questions for educators, directors, and administrators to consider as we approach the 2020-2021 school year.

The answers to these questions will vary based on location, populations involved, learning environment, access to technology, and many other factors. Where we are able, we also include “promising practices” from our members that address the questions being considered. NDEO does not endorse any one specific approach to teaching and learning in these unprecedented times, so long as the safety and well-being of all involved is kept paramount.

The document is centered around several key issues of concern:

1. **MENTAL SHIFTS: ATTITUDES, HABITS, PERCEPTIONS**
2. **SCHEDULING**
3. **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**
4. **FACILITIES**
5. **PHYSICAL PRACTICE**
6. **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**
7. **ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS**
8. **INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND ACCESS**



Photo by Anthony Alterio, Courtesy of SUNY Fredonia

MENTAL SHIFTS: ATTITUDES, HABITS, PERCEPTIONS

What shifts in attitudes, habits, and perceptions of and in dance education will be necessary in order to ensure the safety of all involved in the return to the studio? What changes will be necessary within the culture of dance education in order to deliver safe, effective learning experiences? The many changes to studio practice required to create a safe learning environment may be off-putting to students, families, and institutional administration. Knowing this, what changes can we make to both what we teach and how we teach it in order to keep dance education relevant, accessible, and engaging?

Some of the suggestions from our members and panelists related to shifts in attitudes, habits, and perceptions *of and in* dance education include:

Develop and maintain a culture of enthusiasm, in spite of our present challenges. Find value in the new opportunities presented through online, hybrid online and in-person, socially-distant in-studio formats. Discover ways to communicate that value to students, their families, and institutional administration.

Bring into focus the aspects of dance education are often overlooked in the "typical" learning environments, which often prioritize standardized group technique classes and uniform performance of choreography created by the instructor. There are many other aspects of dance education and related areas of study that could be explored with online, hybrid online and in-person, and socially-distant in-studio classes, including:

- Music and rhythmic training
- Dance history
- Dance medicine and science
- Improvisation
- Choreography and creative practice
- Observing, analyzing, and responding to dance
- Dance writing and criticism
- Dance and arts advocacy
- Somatic practices
- Dance on camera



Photo by Aaron Brewer Photography, Courtesy of Hot Springs World Class High School

Become stronger advocates for the aspects of a dance education that go beyond physical practice and technique. Articulate the ways that dance education fosters creativity, communication skills, citizenship, leadership, and empathy. Discover new ways to market these benefits and convince administration, department heads, parents, etc. of the importance of dance education outside of physical practice and technique.

Keep the students at the center of the learning experience:

- Regularly check in: What do they need in terms of physical practice, emotional support, and creative expression? Recognize and acknowledge that their needs will change throughout the term, so this question will need to be asked often.
- What do they want to take away from this new experience?
- How are they adjusting to new ways of learning, thinking about dance, and being seen by the teacher and other students?
- What feedback do they have for you in terms of class content, delivery, and assessment?
- When possible, take online or socially-distant in-person classes to see what they are like from the student perspective.
- Invite students to contribute to the curriculum design, lesson plan and delivery strategies, and assessment methods.

Explore ways to make or deepen personal connections with students and provide them agency in the learning process:

- Personal coaching and one-on-one instruction
- Within a group setting, students could come to the studio individually while others use recorded materials or independent research from home
- Directed independent studies, in which students design and implement their own learning experiences.
- Increased focus on student reflection through journaling, discussion, response essays, and movement experiences
- Increased student involvement in assessment through collaboratively designed evaluation processes, self and peer assessment, and alternate approaches to summative and formative assessment.



Photo by Isabelle Mordecai Photography, Courtesy of Longleaf School of the Arts

Take advantage of new opportunities for local, statewide, national, and international connections within the dance education field, broader dance industry, arts community, and general population::

- Share resources with other teachers, programs, or institutions.
- Create new opportunities for networking and engagement, both for ourselves and our students.
- Collaborate digitally with other schools or studios, including joint choreography projects, shared concerts, teacher exchanges, and other opportunities to connect online.
- Explore new ways to share our students' work with the field and the community through outdoor, site-specific, and drive-in performances, virtual concerts and dance on film.
- Encourage students to take advantage of opportunities to take online classes with other instructors in a range of dance genres and across cultural practices.
- Encourage students to explore the wealth of digital dance content now available online.
- Invite guest instructors and lecturers from various backgrounds and genres, perhaps connecting with dancers, choreographers, and educators who are unemployed due to the pandemic.



Photo by Lijah Friedman, Courtesy of Barefoot Dance Company

Recognizing that dance is both a physical activity and an art form, consider collaborations with colleagues in physical education, exercise science, and athletic departments on strategies for safely returning to physical practice. Use these alliances to advocate for dance within your institution.

Realize that we are in a period of forced adaptation, and that this new normal is most likely temporary. What will we lose if we choose to return to when a vaccine or effective antiviral becomes available? How much should we change or adapt until that time? What will we lose as we adapt to dancing in the Covid era? What will we lose if we don't adapt?

Use national and state standards for dance education, such as the National Core Arts Standards in Dance, to continue to find new ways to expand our thinking about the role of Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting in dance education. Look for new ways to use the standards in online, hybrid online and in-studio, and socially-distant in-studio classes to support students' well-being and growth.



Photo by Cravotta Photography, Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

Shift our collective mindsets to see this as our "moment" to change education policy and practice. As dance educators, we know that dance can play an integral role in helping students who are struggling with the pandemic's impact on their life and schooling. Research indicates that arts programs help improve school attendance and engagement, which have significantly fallen during the pandemic. Whether offered in-school or as an extracurricular activity, dance provides a connection to body in a time of increasing disembodied (online) interaction, and helps instill the social and emotional skills that will help students navigate this unprecedented period. This is a critical time to get support for dance education from administrations, communities, and families. How can we use this moment to advocate for the role of the arts in education?

SCHEDULING

How can the way classes are scheduled create a safer environment for all involved in the return to the studio? A range of alternative scheduling options were offered to help limit the number of students and faculty in the dance studio and adjacent areas at any time. This option would likely be one of the most effective for preventing the potential spread of Covid-19; however, it presents many challenges for administration, faculty, and students alike.

Some of the suggestions from our members and panelists related to scheduling include:

Students are divided into set groups, with groups coming into the studio and Zooming in from home on alternating days. This could be ideal for private studios, to help them maintain full enrollment while also keeping in-studio classes small.

All students report on all days, but are divided into groups who work on different projects in different locations, such as one group taking technique class in the studio, another working on research in the library, a third doing a site-specific project in an alternate location. This could be ideal for K-12 schools, provided there is enough staff to monitor each group.

All students report on all days, but are divided into small groups working in different rooms or studios connected over Zoom, learning from a single instructor in one of the rooms or a separate location. Students could be supervised entirely over video or by teaching assistants in each room. This could be ideal for collegiate programs, which may have access to multiple spaces and students would need less supervision.

If having students work in different locations on campus is not an option, rotate them in very small groups through "stations" around the studio and adjacent areas like a lobby, engaging them in a mix of recorded materials, research or independent study, and live instruction but supervised by a single instructor.

Offer classes seven days a week, or make academic hours longer each day, with staggered schedules to all for smaller classes and keep fewer people on campus at one time.

Offer shorter classes for the same number of credit hours to allow time for cleaning and sanitizing between classes.

The following are some of the questions raised in discussions of alternate scheduling options:

How would students be divided, and what considerations should be taken in the division of students into small groups? Would they be divided by skill level, interest group, personality, learning style, alphabetically, by age or birthday, or randomly? Would all students work on the same material, or would different learning opportunities be available for each group?

To provide additional supervision for younger students, can the instructor collaborate with teachers in other disciplines? Could additional faculty be brought in? Could a set group of trained parent volunteers be utilized?

Would it be beneficial to have students stay stationary between classes and instead rotate teachers to minimize student transit and unsupervised time? Is it prudent to keep one group together for longer during the day? Would it heighten student risk if one student in the group comes up positive with COVID?

If classes will be offered in a hybrid online and in-person format, how can "Zoom Burnout" be avoided? Consider both the number of classes and the length of each Zoom session to make sure they are appropriate for the student population being served.

Can class times be staggered to minimize overlapping traffic in hallways and common areas? How would this affect overall schedules for the institution?



Photo by Thomas Peters, Courtesy of Hello Dancer, a Magical Dance Studio

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

What new policies and procedures will be required to ensure the safety of all involved in the return to the studio? How will the dance classroom routine need to be modified? Many new or revised policies and procedures were suggested in the discussions. Recommended policies and procedures will vary depending on the learning environment, age of students, facilities being used, and genre of dance being taught.

Some of the question and suggestions from our members and panelists related to policies and procedures include:

- Limited or no access to changing areas, lockers, or restrooms.
- Students must arrive dressed in their dance clothes.
- No bags may be brought into the building, or bags must be kept in designated areas. Students may not access bags during class.
- No street shoes may be worn in the building, shoes must be removed and put into the dance bag before entering.
- No sharing of water bottles, dancewear, props or teaching tools, cell phones,
- Students must wear dance shoes for all dance genres, even those that are normally practiced barefoot.
- Students must sanitize hands before entering the studio.
- Staff, students, and parents must agree to follow guidelines for health and safety.
- Faculty and staff must attend training on health, safety, and sanitation policies.
- No parents, family members, or guests may accompany students into the building.
- Younger students will be escorted into and out of the studio by staff.
- Students must be checked for symptoms at the door.
- Students should not come to class if they or any member of their family have been sick within a set period of time.
- Revised participation waivers may be recommended - check with your lawyer or administration.



Photo by James Wilkus Photography, Courtesy of Art Spark Dance/Body Shift

FACILITIES

What special care will need to be taken within our studios, classrooms, and buildings to ensure the safety of all involved in the return to the studio? This may involve new equipment, modification of how equipment is used, and changes to how we care for our spaces and equipment.

Some of the questions and suggestions from our members and panelists related to facilities include:

Using floor markings to maintain social distancing. For example, mark off 6 foot+ squares with tape on the floor, and include a mark in the center of the square for students to stay on whenever possible.

Take caution when using shared equipment, including barres, props, instruments, cross-training gear (therabands, physioballs, etc.). This equipment should be used sparingly, and sanitation procedures should be in place after each use.

Remove unnecessary items, such as furniture, area rugs, mirror coverings, and theatre fabrics (curtains, legs, etc.), from studios and other other shared spaces.

Consider installing HEPA air filters and purifiers to maintain safe air flow, especially in studios with air conditioning.

Leave doors propped open as much as possible, to limit the number of people touching those surfaces.

Disinfect as often as possible, with a deep clean once or twice a day and maintenance in between classes. This was brought up many times in the discussions as one of the best ways to create a safe studio environment for all involved. However, several questions emerged from this aspect of the discussion. The answers to these questions will vary depending on the learning environment, age of students, facilities being used, and budget of the organization.

- Who is responsible for the additional disinfecting and cleaning of studio spaces? What about lobbies, entryways, dressing areas, restrooms, offices, etc.?
- What equipment and chemicals will be necessary for the disinfection of these spaces? What are the potential risks?
- What training do those responsible receive? What protective gear will be provided to them? Will they receive additional compensation?
- Where will the budget for the labor, equipment, cleaning supplies, and protective gear come from?

- How often will frequently touched surfaces, such as barres, stereos, remotes, or door handles, and shared equipment like tablets or props, need to be sanitized?
- Can or should students be responsible for sanitizing their own surfaces or shared equipment that they are using?
- How often will floors need to be disinfected, and how can this be done without damaging marley or other specialized flooring?



Photo by Savannah Lee Photos, Courtesy of Louisburg College

If your studios are not large enough to allow for 6 foot+ space for each student, consider holding classes in alternative spaces. Suggested spaces included gyms or cafeterias (in K-12 schools), ballrooms or conference areas (on college campuses), or outdoors in athletic fields, community parks, or even parking lots.

Questions to consider when planning for classes in alternative spaces include:

- What additional costs would be incurred, especially for private studios who might have to secure permits to use parks or outdoor spaces?
- What additional equipment would be needed, such as portable speakers and megaphones or microphones for instructors?
- How would student dress code be affected? For example, students should wear tennis shoes when dancing outdoors.
- What are the hazards that could be involved when dancing in these alternative spaces?

PHYSICAL PRACTICE

What changes will need to be made in how we plan lessons, deliver instruction, and assess learning in the dance studio in order to ensure the safety of all involved in the return to the studio? The answers to this question will vary depending on the learning environment, age of students, facilities being used, and genre of dance being taught.

Some of the questions and suggestions from our members and panelists related to physical practice of dance in education include:

Consider keeping the dancers in one place as much as possible to maintain physical distancing. Limit across the floor work and locomotor progressions as students moving through the same space one after another may lead to increased chance of disease transmission.

Consider the rate of exertion that is expected from students. Heavy or forceful breathing could lead to increased chance of disease transmission. For students who are engaged in vigorous dancing, 6 feet of distance may not be enough to prevent droplet transmission through breath and sweat.

Consider eliminating floor work, as skin contact, sweat, and breath on the floor may lead to increased chance of disease transmission.

Consider reducing or eliminating the use of equipment and props, including barres, mats and fitness gear, and props like scarves, instruments, and hula hoops.

Consider alternative methods for teaching dance forms that traditionally involve physical contact. These include partnered Latin dance forms, ballet pas de deux, and contact improvisation among others. Some suggestions include:

- Consider teaching these forms as a solo practice only where possible. However, one must consider if this is true to the form and if it provides the students with an authentic experience of the dance genre.
- Consider “safer” partnering practices. Students could be required to enroll with a person who is inside their circle of contact, such as a friend or roommate, or be assigned a set partner from within the class, and limit their physical contact in class to that person.
- Students taking an online or hybrid online and in-person class could practice with a family member at home if one is available and willing.

SHAPE America has generously shared the following guidance document created in cooperation with the CDC and which can be used to address safety issues relating to dance as a physical activity: https://www.shapeamerica.org//advocacy/K-12_School_Re-entry_Considerations.aspx



Photo by Christopher Roybal, Courtesy of National Institute of Flamenco

Carefully consider whether you will require students to wear masks while they are dancing. Masks are widely consider one of the best ways to minimize the risk of spreading Covid-19, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing masks whenever you are in close contact with others, including while exercising. However, some research indicates that dancing in a mask can be dangerous to those *with underlying health conditions*. When students are dancing in masks, consider the following:

- Students will need to adjust to wearing a mask while dancing, and shorter, less vigorous movement classes may be advisable during this adjustment period. **A "normal" class may not be feasible for many weeks, if at all.**
- Caution must be taken for students with underlying conditions, such as asthma, heart conditions, and breathing issues. Wearing masks while dancing might not be advisable for these populations. Students should consult with their own physician.
- Consider the type of mask required, as thinner masks may make breathing easier than thicker ones. New masks designed specifically for physical activity are now available.
- Privacy issues may arise, as students may end up revealing underlying health conditions in their choice to wear or not wear masks.
- If masks or other PPE are required for teachers or students, who will be providing them? What kind will be required? Where will the funding come from?
- If teachers are required to wear masks, they may experience vocal strain. A microphone or megaphone may be advisable.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS

What administrative concerns should be considered in plans and preparations to return to the studio? In our discussions, many issues related to the administration of programs and schools were raised. Educators and program directors alike expressed concern about budget and financial issues, job security for educators, recruitment, auditions, and enrollment, and performances.

Some of the questions raised by our members and panelists related to administrative concerns include:

How will the pandemic affect the sustainability of dance programs in all environments?

- Are alternative schedules, including hybrid online and in-person classes, really a desirable alternative for students, families, teachers, and administrators?
- How will enrollment be impacted by alternative scheduling options? If class sizes must be reduced to allow for social distancing, will programs be able to meet their budgets?
- Will higher education programs be able to supplement their budgets with large general education or introductory movement classes for non-majors? How will this affect graduate students who often teach these courses?
- As the arts are often first to be impacted by budget cuts in K-12 education, will programs be at risk even if the programs themselves find ways to become financially sustainable?
- How will community programs that rely on grants be affected? Will grantmakers support smaller classes, new equipment, and alternate teaching strategies?

How will paid leave and substitute teaching staff be affected? Teachers will be more likely to take more sick days, as they will be encouraged to stay home if showing even mild symptoms or if they were exposed. Will teachers receive more sick leave or PTO? Will they be compensated if they need to quarantine? Who will substitute their classes? There are often limited subs available in higher education and private studios, and not every K-12 district has substitutes with any dance experience.

How will teachers be compensated for additional labor? If teachers in any learning environment are required to teach more classes to accommodate smaller class sizes, extend the academic day to accommodate staggered schedules, or conduct hybrid online and in-person classes that require more planning time, will they be paid more? Where will this budget come from?

How will programs handle recruitment and auditions?

- Consider video audition options for both program enrollment and in-program audition for teams, companies, and concerts.
- Pair interested and incoming students with current students to foster relationships online, build community, and generate enthusiasm for the coming year.
- Host recruitment events and orientations online.

How will programs present performances or otherwise share student work?

- Consider a range of performance alternatives, including outdoor venues, site-specific work, drive-in concerts, dance on camera, and live digital performances.
- Consider programming only solo work and very small group pieces to create safer in-person rehearsals.
- Perform for small, socially-distant audiences in unconventional spaces or theatres at very limited capacity.
- Find new ways to engage production staff in the process of creating alternative performance opportunities.



Photo by Aaron Brewer Photography, Courtesy of Hot Springs High School

The National Honor Society for Dance Arts allows you to recognize and honor your students even in online and alternative learning environments. Learn more at www.nhsda-ndeo.org.

INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND ACCESS

What special considerations related to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access will be required as we teach through the Covid era? How can we support students who may be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including students of color, students of lower socioeconomic status, and students with special needs? Teaching in times of crisis brings into hyper-focus issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access that are always present in education. This is a moment to renew our commitment to teaching in ways that are more inclusive, culturally responsive, and aware of the unique needs that so many of our students experience at all times, but particularly in times of crisis.

Some of the suggestions from our members and panelists related to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access include:

Recognize that we must teach all students how to be successful in online or hybrid online and in-person learning environments, especially those who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Build lessons with learning strategies into the curriculum.

Recognize that students who are at high risk may need to take extra precautions. Those with underlying health conditions, or those with family members who are at high risk, may need accomodations including not attending in-person class sessions. Where possible, make online options or special exceptions available for these students.

Consider access equity issues that arise when teaching online and hybrid online and in-studio classes that rely on at-home resources and support.

- Realize that students may not have access to technology and equipment needed for successful online learning, including devices to share among family members, access to high speed internet, and private space within the home for learning. Adjust your expectation and assessment practices accordingly.
- Realize that students may be taking on new responsibilities at home, such as caring for siblings. Synchronous learning experiences may be difficult, if not impossible, under these circumstances. Consider offering alternate options for fulfilling coursework that are asynchronous and flexible.

- Realize that students may be uncomfortable sharing their home spaces via video, and that doing so may expose issues such as poverty, abuse, or neglect. Consider offering alternate options for fulfilling coursework that do not require video conferencing, especially those in which other students are online.
- Realize that students may not have family support at home to help hold them accountable for their learning. Regularly check in with these students via multiple forms of communication if possible. Consider offering alternate options for fulfilling coursework that require smaller, more manageable assignments and flexible due dates.

Focus on dancers' mental health and social-emotional learning.

- Conduct frequent check-ins with students, one on one where possible.
- Create wellness packets for students, and where appropriate, their families. Packets could include breathing exercises, wellness strategies, and information on mental health resources.
- Recognize that all students, but those especially who have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, may display behavioral issues, obvious or less obvious signs of stress, lack of focus and motivation, and other symptoms of trauma. Consider ways to include emotional growth and learning into your coursework.

Have a plan in place for students who become ill, or have to quarantine after coming into contact with someone who is ill. What accommodations will be made for these students in terms of online access, grading and assessment, credit options, and other key areas?



Photo Courtesy of Fei Tian College Middletown

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There still are many unknowns remain about the virus, and information has been rapidly emerging. The following were distributed to attendees of The NDEO Cross-Sector Brainstorm SIG meeting on May 14, 2020 and represent the available resources related to the return to school and the studio at the time of that meeting. You may find them helpful.

- *Considerations for Reintegrating Into the Dance Studio* by Dr. Kat Bower PT and Dr. Kathleen L. Davenport MD
- *The Risks - Know Them - Avoid Them* by Erin Bromage

You may also find these resources helpful:

- https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/personal-social-activities.html
- https://www.cnet.com/health/how-to-safely-exercise-with-a-face-mask-on-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
- National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) in Dance and Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts: www.ndeo.org/standards
- NDEO Covid-19 Resources: www.ndeo.org/covid19online
- Dance/USA Covid-19 Resources: https://www.danceusa.org/resources-preparing-potential-impact-coronavirusSchool
- Re-entry Considerations: K-12 Physical Education, Health Education, and Physical Activity, a resource from SHAPE America: https://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/K-12_School_Re-entry_Considerations.aspx

ABOUT NDEO

The National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) is a non-profit, membership organization dedicated to advancing dance education centered in the arts for people of all backgrounds. NDEO provides dance artists, educators, and administrators of all backgrounds a network of resources and support, a base for advocacy and research, and access to professional development opportunities that focus on the importance of dance in the human experience.

Major Programs of NDEO include:

- National Conference
- Online Professional Development Institute
- Special Topics Conferences
- *Journal of Dance Education* & *Dance Education in Practice*
- National Honor Society for Dance Arts
- Behind the Curtain Blog
- Online Forums & Special Interest Groups
- Standards

The National Dance Education Organization envisions a nation that affords every citizen equal access and opportunity to quality dance arts education regardless of gender, age, race or culture, socio-economic status, ability or interest.

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