

HOW JUNIATA VALLEY CREATED THE SAFEST SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT POSSIBLE

“It is not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, and then do your best.”

-William Edwards Deming-

The Who What Where Why How...

Schools across the nation are struggling with reopening plans. Even in good times school openings at any level are always stressful. But this year the need for ensuring a clean, safe and healthy school environment has created additional first-time complexities.

Widely acknowledge as the leading management thinker in the field of quality, Deming’s principle of “knowing what to do so you can do your best,” is extremely challenging and holds true for school administrators preparing to reopen.

Here’s the story of how one school district and a nearby company are working together to find practical solutions and best practices to ensure the cleanest, safest environment possible for their students and faculty. Juniata Valley is the small rural school district (750 students) in central Pennsylvania committed to doing just that. Only 25 miles away is New Pig Corporation, a well-known company with 35 years’ experience helping hundreds of thousands of facilities worldwide stay clean and safe. They’ve been hearing from the education sector about the struggle for most schools of figuring out how to turn guidelines on paper into a real-time safe school plan that everyone can follow.

Lucky Local Connections

Enter Rachel Boyd, school nurse at Juniata Valley and member of the school’s Pandemic Response Team. Always with an ear to the best health and safety practices, she was aware of the challenges facing the school’s reopening. Together with Matt Franks, Assistant Principal and Pandemic Coordinator, Rachel brought her husband John, a Juniata Valley graduate who works for New Pig, into the conversation. That connection led to adding another member to the team, Heidi Shetler, Director, Safe Schools Program.



Directional floor markers and portable barriers reinforce traffic patterns and social distancing in entrances.



Establishing one-way traffic patterns and social distancing in halls helps to keep students safe while they’re on the move.



This group led the discussion to gain a greater understanding of how New Pig products could help supplement the extensive preparations already implemented by the school's Pandemic Response Team.

Pandemic Response Team Did Their Homework

It was obvious that Juniata Valley's Pandemic Response Team passed its "let's be prepared" exam with flying colors! They had been meeting for months to make sure they were on top of the latest state and federal government guidelines and regulations. This was made clear in their careful planning and effort before ever meeting with New Pig - their guidelines covered everything from busing and classrooms to technology and hygiene.

Determined Administrators

Matt Franks voiced his concerns at the initial get-together: *"Creating an environment that is safe for in-person learning for the students, teachers and faculty of the Juniata Valley School District is our number one priority, but it has been extremely challenging to get prepared. State and federal recommendations and regulations are vague, general statements rather than a clear guide."*

"Schools are designed for interaction and collaboration which can bring unique challenges when you are trying to comply with social distancing and face covering demands," added Mike Estep, Juniata Valley High School Principal. *"We must think about every aspect of the student's day from building entry to traffic flow between bells to classroom and cafeteria settings. It's very overwhelming. Plus, supplies are in short supply across the world right now because everyone needs them."*

"Yes, more regs and frequently changing recommendations make it difficult to follow," said Franks. *"In addition, products like plexiglass, for example, are out of stock so we've been left scrambling. While the CARES funding has been a welcomed support, we've put most of those funds towards technology in the event we need to go remote again. So, finding practical solutions to the ever-changing requirements is really important."*

Now their main concern was how to implement effective solutions for maintaining the recommended guidelines for the cleanest, safest school environment possible. New Pig saw this not only as an opportunity to help a school, but also as an excellent chance to learn on the job. It made good sense for



"Don't sit here" markers help to keep recommended spacing at tables.

New Pig to partner with its neighbor and assist them with the challenges they were facing.

Passion, Plans, Products and Practical Solutions

Heidi and John met with the school administrators, reviewed the Pandemic Response Team's strategy and discussed some of the key areas of concern and problems that still needed to be solved. They took this information and developed an action plan that would be implemented the following day. That plan was shaped around the following three points:

1. Define Guidelines

What are the rules? Are face coverings required? Promoting handwashing and sanitizers? Plans for one-way traffic flows? Decide what behaviors to encourage and how to get everyone to comply. Outline cleaning procedures.

2. Define Communication Strategy

Think of all the areas in the facility and how to communicate the rules. Begin with where — at the entrance? Where is the best place to convey guidelines? What about monitoring hall traffic and restrooms?

3. Use Products that Support Strategy

Use floor signs and markers that are designed to work together



to clearly communicate what everyone needs to do. Set up sanitizer stations and personal protection centers with masks and face shields. Use barriers in spots where adequate distancing is unworkable.

With those considerations in mind and armed with products and practical knowledge, they began to implement simple solutions wherever they saw a problem.

It was decided to start with the elementary school. To help with directional traffic control they outfitted their front lobbies and side entrances to multiple hallways and then moved on with some ideas for the library, cafeteria and auditorium.

One of the main concerns was entry into the school. The team decided to create one-way traffic through the main entrance to each school. From there a hand sanitizing station was placed in both pathways and it was identified with a social distance floor marker as well as a sign on the wall. To encourage social distancing the team also placed adjustable sneeze barriers in-between two sets of double doors to ensure student separation. Entrance mats with the school's mascot were used to remind students and faculty about the school's protocol. And, floor markers were placed in the entrance way and down the halls to guide students to stay 6 feet apart.

Another challenge was how to social distance in a classroom with so many desks and students. Keep in mind room size doesn't change, but the number of students will. So, the team equipped two different classrooms with adjustable clear barriers to demonstrate how to accommodate an increase of students.

The team also shared face coverings and personal safety kits for visitors, along with disposable wipes to help with cleaning of classrooms and common areas. Then came the installation of floor mats and markers for every possible scenario: social distancing mats to point out guidelines concerning wearing face coverings and staying 6 feet apart, directional mats and markers to direct students to the many hand sanitizing stations around campus and to help manage the flow of students in hallways, stairwells, auditorium and large areas.



Portable barriers, face coverings and "don't sit here" markers allow students to share work spaces in common areas.

Matt Franks and the response team came up with a cool idea to inject some fun in the overall mood during this stressful time -- incorporate the Hornet, the school mascot, into the social distancing floor signs and markers to help soften the strong messaging throughout the school. This made it especially inviting for elementary students, and instead of using a traditional block "X" on their floor markers, they decided to use tennis shoes.

An enthusiastic Shetler stated, "It's always been New Pig's mission to help keep facilities clean and safe. We're proud to be able to partner with schools across the country at such a challenging time. Juniata Valley School District and so many others that we've spoken to are doing a fabulous job to make the safest return possible."

Franks added confidently, "Going into this school year, it feels great to know that we have done everything possible to keep our students, faculty and staff safe."



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