



August 20, 2021

RE-OPENING PLAN FOR SEPTEMBER, 2021

Since the COVID-driven closure of in-person schooling in March, 2020 we have, collectively, endured great trauma and have collaborated in the exploration of strategies for sustaining instruction during this global pandemic. We have seen the importance of providing in-person instruction, and we have noted the effectiveness of layered mitigation strategies in preventing the spread of the virus.

As you know, this Summer saw some chaos in State government, which yielded a general lack of guidance about school reopening. Nonetheless, school leaders from our region have met regularly to discuss appropriate reopening strategies, and our district's Reopening Planning Committee has continued its hard work in planning for a safe, in-person return in September. Summaries of the more consequential reopening considerations are here:

Masking

Though most societal activities have taken place in recent months without a mask mandate, the introduction of the Delta variant has renewed masking requirements in some areas, and has reinforced the effectiveness of mask wearing as the foremost strategy for preventing virus spread. In-keeping, our district will begin the 2021-22 school year with a near-universal masking expectation -- just as we have practiced since last September's return. In sum, all individuals (youth and adult, students and staff, vaccinated or not) will be expected to wear masks indoors. Exceptions to this masking protocol are few, and are limited to food consumption, designated mask breaks, and instances when faculty/staff are alone in a workspace. Last year, tolerance of mask-wearing in our district was exceptional, and though this Summer surely featured general non-masking, we are confident this protocol will again be accepted and successful. There will be no masking requirement for outdoor activities.

Distancing

Guidance from public health authorities indicates that distancing is still desirable and important, but that last year's six-foot standard may be moderated. As such, we will utilize a three-foot distancing standard, but will seek to maximize student separation to the extent practical. We will again employ a greater distancing standard (this year at six-feet) in certain high-respiration activities such as chorus and physical education. There will be no distancing expectation for outdoor activities.

Remote instruction / Instruction during quarantine periods

Our district will no longer offer a parent remote instruction option. Our district has always featured a system of providing homebound instruction to medically-fragile students, and this

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system remains in-place. The school closures of the past 18 months have reinforced the importance of in-person instruction. Last year's school experience featured numerous precautionary quarantines because of possible exposure, which ranged in duration up to 10 school days, and were the result of contact tracing efforts led by the Clinton County Health Department, with assistance from our school district. The introduction of vaccines last Winter/Spring brought about a marked decrease in the incidence of quarantines at the secondary level, but until a pediatric vaccine is available for our younger students and while the Delta variant remains problematic, these frustrating, recurring quarantines will surely continue to some degree. In anticipation of such and based upon our experiences last year, we will provide continued academic support to students who are placed in these precautionary quarantines using a '3pm-5pm' remote outreach strategy. An in-person '3pm-5pm' program has long-existed at the secondary level, and this quarantine-version will essentially entail a remote deployment of such. At the elementary level, a parallel system will be introduced in which grade-specific Teachers will provide remote outreach to quarantined students during this 3pm-5pm timeframe. Teachers at all levels will continue to use Microsoft Teams as a platform for posting daily assignments and materials, but there will be no ongoing expectation that in-person instruction will be livestreamed or recorded and posted for quarantined students. Some Teachers may elect to provide these or other supplements to the above-referenced 3pm-5pm strategy, but these should be considered as extra outreach which may not be delivered universally.

Co-curricular activities

We anticipate a broad return of co-curricular activities, including interscholastic athletics. Indoor co-curricular activity participants (including spectators) will abide by the masking requirement outlined above. For Fall-season athletics, masks will be worn during all volleyball activities and whenever swimmers are not in the pool. In addition to respecting the indoor masking rule, spectators will also be asked to distance themselves (minimally to the three-foot standard, but greater if possible) during indoor activities.

School visitors

More school visitors will be welcome in the school building this year, and Principals will have discretion in admitting these guests until and unless such impedes our safety protocols. The most notable illustration of this approach is likely the return of Student Teachers and Support Service Providers into our buildings. For now, parents will not be invited to join their elementary children during lunchtimes, but other parent and guest activities such as orientations and open houses will proceed -- again, at the discretion of each building Principal.

Buses

Students will be expected to remain masked while on school buses, and whenever the weather is suitable, bus windows will be open. As before, no firm distancing standards will apply, but riders will be expected to distance maximally while on the bus. All forms of bus transportation (daily ridership, transport to athletic contests, transport to field trips) will resume.

Pivot to remote instruction

We contemplate moving classes/grades/schools to fully-remote, virtual instruction only if such is decreed by public health authorities or if quarantines become so extensive that in-person instruction becomes impractical. If a temporary pivot to remote instruction becomes

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necessary, we will employ the Microsoft Teams platform, a system of parent notification, and a daily schedule which were used last year. If this eventuality becomes necessary, all parties will receive additional details.

Miscellaneous

There are innumerable and unpredictable scenarios of COVID protocols which are beyond the scope of this plan. In general, the district will defer to health authorities (such as the CCHD and the NYSDOH) and function-specific authorities (such as NYSED and NYSPHSAA) to help resolve such details. As a general, ongoing stance, the district supports COVID vaccinations and encourages all eligible individuals to avail themselves of such. If/when a pediatric vaccine becomes available, the district will work with local health authorities to facilitate access. Similarly, if health officials recommend a systemic in-school testing regimen, all local school districts have researched and are ready to deploy such. As before, the onset of symptoms will require that unvaccinated individuals isolate until 48-hours after these symptoms resolve, and to obtain a negative COVID test or alternate physician diagnosis before returning to school. In recognition of the burden which this health department requirement caused families last year, our district's medical personnel are exploring alternatives and/or ways of limiting the incidence of these exclusions.

While circumstances are undoubtedly improved from last Summer, the COVID pandemic is far from concluded, and our continued vigilance is critical. District personnel recognize that many people's Summer 2021 lifestyle has featured limited protocols and a return to pre-pandemic societal norms. But, as a pediatric vaccine is not yet available, and with the Delta variant introducing increased risk, we believe that the mitigation strategies outlined above are prudent and reasonable. We will continue to assess these strategies and to confer with public health officials, and all parties should expect the fluidity which we've experienced previously to persist. Together, we will continue to balance the often-competing interests of education and public health, and will navigate this still-difficult situation as best we can.

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