

West Central C.U.S.D. #235

2021-2022 Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

Introduction

Sweeping through the world in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in major upheaval to all aspects of life, including unprecedented school closures in the spring and fall of 2020. To open schools for in-person instruction required strict health and safety protocols which created barriers and limitations to teaching and learning. Recognizing that students across remote and in-person settings faced significant academic, social, emotional, and mental health challenges as a result of the interrupted education and the trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Congress made emergency funds available to local school districts to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Most recently, funds available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act require that school districts develop a *Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services*. As such, this plan has been developed in accordance with the ARP Act and the Illinois State Superintendent of Education declaration of July 9, 2021; is aligned with guidance provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and addresses adjustments needed in response to evolving COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. The CDC/IDPH/ISBE recognize local control during Phase 5 as stated:

“Together with local public health officials, school administrators should consider multiple factors when they make decisions about implementing layered prevention strategies against COVID-19. Since schools typically serve their surrounding communities, decisions should be based on the school population, families, and students served, as well as their communities.”

This plan will be made publicly available on the district’s website. School strategies in this plan may be removed based upon local conditions, levels of community transmission (i.e., low, moderate, substantial, or high), local vaccination coverage, use of screening testing to detect cases in K-12 schools, and consultation with local public health officials to determine the prevention strategies needed. School officials will communicate any changes in plans to staff members, students, and parents through the district’s regular communication platforms.

Maintaining the Health and Safety of Students, Educators, and Other Staff

In accordance with the Illinois State Superintendent of Schools July 9, 2021 declaration, all West Central C.U.S.D. #235 schools will be open fully for in-person learning for all student attendance days for the 2021-22 school year. Remote instruction will only be made available for non-vaccinated or vaccine ineligible students who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health. Absent an order from the Illinois State Board of Education and/or the Illinois Governor’s Office, West Central C.U.S.D. #235 schools will be in operation in accordance with the CDC’s updated (July 9, 2021) *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K)-12 Schools*, also adopted by the

IDPH on July 9, 2021. The West Central Pre-K program will also follow this guidance. These guidelines include the following:

1. Mask Use

- Mask use is recommended indoors for students, staff and visitors who are not fully vaccinated.
- School staff are to model support for and encourage students to be supportive of people who continue to wear a mask as a personal choice or because of a personal medical reason.
- Unless exempt by CDC Order, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses. Drivers do not need to wear a mask if he/she is the only person on the bus.

2. Physical Distancing

- To the extent possible within school and classroom structures so that it does not exclude students from full day in-person learning, school staff are to help students commit to physical distancing as much as possible by:
 - arranging furniture, play spaces and naptime materials to model and reinforce physical distancing of at least 3 feet to the greatest extent possible;
 - providing assigned seating for students and encouraging students to remain in these seats to the greatest extent possible; and
 - developing paths of travel in classrooms and corridors.
- School staff will maximize physical distance as much as possible when moving through food service lines and while eating indoors. Aside from the cafeteria, additional spaces for mealtime seating may be utilized when available and feasible (e.g., weather permitting). Students and staff who are fully vaccinated do not need to distance while eating.

3. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

- School staff will monitor and reinforce frequent handwashing and respiratory etiquette by
 - continuing to teach handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
 - assisting young children with handwashing;
 - reminding everyone in the facility to wash hands frequently;
 - using hand sanitizer when handwashing is not possible;
 - continuing to teach respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes); and
 - providing adequate handwashing and hand sanitizer supplies that are safely stored (up, away, and out of sight of young children and used only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age).

4. Facility and Transportation Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation

- School staff will continue to clean surfaces daily.
- When possible, staff will open doors and windows, use child-safe fans, and have activities, classes, or lunches outdoors when circumstances allow.

- When it does not pose a safety risk, transportation staff will keep vehicle windows open at least a few inches to improve air circulation.

5. Technology

- A Chromebook, a case, and a charger will be distributed to each student in Grades K-12 during the first week of school.
- At the time of distribution, students in grades 6-12 will be required to complete a checkout form provided via Google Forms that identifies the equipment received.
- Students in Grades 6-12 will be allowed to take their Chromebooks home each night.

6. Other Programs

- All extra-curricular activities will follow the most current CDC, IDPH, and ISBE guidance.
- Athletics will follow the guidelines provided by the IHSA and the IESA as well.

7. Transportation to and from School

- Transportation for all students who qualify will be provided.
- Students who ride the bus will be required to wear a face mask on the bus at all times. Students will be assigned a seat as far away from other riders as possible. Students must remain in their assigned seat and continue to wear their face mask throughout the bus ride. Students will be assigned a morning bus, an afternoon bus, and/or a shuttle bus and must ride their assigned bus on a consistent basis. For safety reasons, daily changes to busing will not be allowed.
- School buses will be disinfected daily at the end of both morning and evening routes and allowed to sit overnight for maximum disinfectant time.

8. Driver's Education Behind-the-Wheel

- Only two students and one instructor allowed per vehicle.
- Face masks are recommended to be worn.
- Eating and drinking are prohibited while in the vehicle.
- Windows will be open whenever possible.
- No unnecessary stops during the training will occur.
- Hand hygiene with soap & water or hand sanitizer will occur before and after driving.
- The steering wheel, door handles, seatbelt fastener, controls/dials, keys, seats, etc. will be disinfected in between each behind-the-wheel session.

9. Physical Education, Gymnasiums, and Locker Rooms

- Physical Education activities will be designed to allow for physical distancing as much as possible. When weather permits, Physical Education classes will be held outside.
- Equipment will be cleaned and disinfected frequently. Students and staff should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer at the start and end of each class period.
- Locker rooms will not be open at this time, and students will not be required to change into P.E. clothing.

10. Lockers

- Lockers will be available for use at the beginning of the day, the end of the day, and before lunch at the middle school and high school.
- Lockers will be available for use when scheduled by the classroom teacher at the elementary.

11. Meals

- Breakfast and lunch meals that meet USDA standards will be served at school on student attendance days free of charge.

12. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

- Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, should stay home, contact their child's school, and/or consider contacting their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Individuals in our school environments who show symptoms of COVID-19 are to immediately report to or be escorted to the Building Office to be either sent home or be quarantined in the school's supervised safe area while awaiting pickup/evaluation. Students and staff are required to wear masks while in the safe area. Ill students will not be allowed to utilize the school bus to return home. To facilitate COVID-19 diagnosis and inform the need for quarantine of close contacts and isolation, a rapid COVID-19 test can be administered on site only with parental consent.
- Students and staff who are not fully vaccinated should quarantine per IDPH guidelines after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19.
- Fully vaccinated people who were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do NOT have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or be tested.
- Student absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded as excused. To ensure continuity of services, school work missed during such an absence can be requested and made up in accordance with the school's policy (refer to District Student Handbook). Remote instruction will only be made available for non-vaccinated or vaccine ineligible students who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- Staff absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded in accordance with the district's sick leave policy and related professional negotiations agreements.
- To the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, school health care professionals will continue to collaborate with Henderson County Health Department officials to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, including making notifications to staff and parents as soon as possible regarding those who were in close contact of someone in the school who tested positive for COVID-19.
- The District Superintendent will inform the school community of outbreaks while maintaining student and staff confidentiality rights.

- Students and staff suspected of having COVID-19, whether they were tested or not, are to follow the CDC and local health department guidelines to determine when they can return to school.
- Following quarantine, students and staff returning from illness related to COVID-19 are to call to check in with the school's health care professional prior to returning to school.

13. Screening Testing

- Parents should keep their children home from school if they are sick or exhibiting symptoms.
- Parents can request COVID-19 screening testing for their students by contacting the school's health care professional.
- Any staff member can request COVID-19 screening testing by contacting the school's health care professional.

14. Vaccination

- Working with the Henderson County Health Department, a COVID-19 vaccination clinic, available to West Central students and staff 12 years of age and older, will be held on Tuesday, August 24. This clinic will start at 11:00 a.m. at West Central Middle School. Once all who have chosen to be vaccinated have received the vaccine, the clinic will move to the north campus. Parent permission for students under the age of 18 is required.
- The Henderson County Health Department has an open vaccination clinic available to all individuals 12 and over every Wednesday, 8:00 – 9:00 a.m.
- Respectful of peoples' varying levels of vaccine confidence, those who want to get vaccinated against COVID-19 can also call the Henderson County Health Department to find out where and when they can get vaccinated in our community.

15. Visitors

- Nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations are discouraged from visiting schools when students are present during the academic day.
- To protect the safety of our students and staff, parents, when dropping their child(ren) off in the morning, will be required to drop their child(ren) off at the designated exterior door. Students will enter through the main doors in the middle school and high school. Elementary students who ride a bus will be dropped off at the main doors of the elementary. Elementary students who are dropped off by a parent/guardian will be dropped off at the South entrance (E1) of the elementary.
- In addition to the normal sign in procedures, unvaccinated visitors to any building should properly wear an appropriate and approved face mask. All visitors should report directly to the main office of the building. Visitors will remain in the main office or other designated area for the duration of the visit. Students or staff will be asked to meet the visitor to conduct business as needed. Visitors will not have access to the

building during the regular school day as to protect the safety of our students and staff.

- All visitors entering the building should not enter the building if they are exhibiting any of the following symptoms: fever (100.4°F or higher), new onset of moderate to severe headache, shortness of breath, new cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, new loss of sense of taste or smell, fatigue from unknown cause, and/or muscle or body aches from unknown cause.

16. Collaboration with Public Health Officials

- District officials will continue to collaborate and consult with Henderson County Health Department officials throughout a pandemic on various logistics and decision-making including, but not limited to, school health and safety protocols, screening testing, contact tracing, vaccine clinics, and emergency school closings.

17. Plan Review

- We will continue to monitor the health and wellbeing of our students and staff and adjust accordingly if needed. Everyone should be prepared to wear masks if our local metrics warrant that need.
- This plan will be reviewed no less frequently than every six months and revised as appropriate after seeking and considering public input. Revisions will address the most recently updated safety recommendations by the CDC/IDPH and will be made publicly available on the district's website.