



Parkland School District

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Health and Safety Plan Update-July 2021

Parkland School District administration is recommending a health and safety plan which utilizes recommendations of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH), Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to the greatest extent practical. These recommendations are provided to help school districts in creating a safe environment for a return to full in-person K-12 instruction. Please know this information and guidance is changing rapidly.

We recognize that due to the unique nature of these decisions, some members of the school community may feel the recommendations are too restrictive, while others may feel the recommendations are not restrictive enough. Our District will continue to have productive dialogue regarding all aspects of the Health and Safety Plan.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requires each school entity to create a Health and Safety Plan which will serve as the local guidelines for all instructional school reopening activities. This plan must be approved by its governing body and posted on the school entity's publicly available website by July 31, 2021.

As with all emergency plans, the Health and Safety Plan developed for each school entity should be tailored to the unique needs of each school and should be created in consultation with local health agencies. Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic, each plan should incorporate enough flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. The CDC has developed recommendations with the key takeaway that "Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority". CDC guidance identifies multiple prevention strategies that schools can implement in a layered approach to promote safer in-person learning and care. Use of multiple strategies – also called layered prevention – provides greater protection in breaking transmission chains than implementing a single strategy. Our top priority in our planning is to allow for a safe return to full-time in-person instruction.

Additionally, the Health and Safety Plan for how schools will operate in the fall involves a thorough, evidence-based evaluation of the health risks to students and staff, and balances those risks against the significant academic, social-emotional, nutritional and financial harm to students and families caused by school closures. There is no one educational decision that will alleviate every concern, or satisfy the desires of every person, but Parkland School District remains steadfast in our commitment to serve our community safely.

The PSD Health and Safety Plan consists of an array of interventions and strategies that, when applied consistently, work in combination to mitigate the overall spread of the virus. We have worked collaboratively and in consultation with our department of



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health officials and our medical providers at St. Luke's University Health Network and Lehigh Valley Health Network to prepare for a safe return to school for students and staff. Parkland Administrators serve on a county-wide task force with other school district administrators and health officials related to the reopening of schools, recognizing the need for all of us to work collaboratively to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our region.

This Health and Safety Plan is designed to enable the District to navigate changes associated with improving or declining health indicators and to adjust the plan as needed. We fully understand there is no single precaution, or set of precautions, that will completely eradicate COVID-19, or prevent its transmission. The goal is to keep transmission as low as possible to safely continue school activities.

Guidance from the CDC is based on national data and at times can be more or less restrictive than the local area. Some areas may see the need to adhere to strict CDC guidance based on vaccination rates and community spread in their particular area at that time. Some areas can be less restrictive to start the school year based on higher vaccination rates and lower community spread. For example, last year, PDE and the Governor recommended more restrictive strategies for schools based on the level of community spread at that time. However, as we stand today, we see the vaccination rate in PA and specifically, the Lehigh Valley, higher than many areas of the country and current community spread has remained lower, although recently on the rise.

Unfortunately, in just a week's time, we are starting to see an increase in cases here in Pennsylvania and it is forcing all school districts to make a very hard decision about how to start the school year. We have had numerous calls with local health networks and have heard from our families. In the end, we must make the decision that we feel keeps the health and safety of all students and staff at the forefront of our decision-making. Parkland School District's Health and Safety Plan is designed to meet the CDC's main priority: Open schools for in-person instruction while utilizing layered mitigation factors. Here are the main areas of the Health and Safety Plan:

1. Prioritize 5 Days per week of In-Person Instruction in all schools
2. Ongoing analysis of local transmission and vaccination data
3. Utilize Layered Mitigation Strategies including:
 - Recommending (not requiring) face coverings for unvaccinated individuals
 - Requiring face coverings on school transportation, in the nurse's suites, and athletic training rooms
 - Encouraging vaccinations for those eligible
 - Physical distancing when feasible



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- Emphasizing good personal hygiene practices
- Cleaning and sanitizing our buildings regularly
- Proper air ventilation
- Contact tracing when COVID cases occur
- Symptom monitoring
- Continuous communication with local health care providers to follow community spread guidance

Changes to Health and Safety Plan Draft

On Wednesday July 21, we communicated to families a DRAFT of our Health and Safety Plan. As part of our decision making process, we provided an opportunity for families to provide feedback on the plan. We have reviewed over 750 comments submitted to the District. Subsequently, changes were made to the DRAFT plan previously provided in respect to face coverings.

The Draft Health and Safety Plan was taken directly from the CDC recommendations for face coverings from July 9, 2021. In an effort to clarify our intentions, we have further defined our expectations. In essence, face coverings are still currently a “*recommendation*” for students and staff, but are subject to change based on a number of potential factors including governmental requirements, community transmission rates as determined by the CDC, or the number of cases within a specific building.

We are in the process of developing a layered masking strategy to help us when or if needed. This decision making tool will be developed in conjunction with our local health care providers. This tool will be shared with the school board and public before the start of school if implemented. Building level plans for elementary schools, secondary schools, as well as specifics for the Performing and Visual Arts, and Athletics will also be released in the coming weeks.

Closing

The 2021-2022 school year will not be a pre-pandemic year, but we can be very close. It will include five days per week of in-person instruction, our children seeing friends again on a daily basis, closer to normal athletic events, field trips, community use of facilities...all to help us build our sense of community back. We recognize the social emotional toll this pandemic has had on all of us, especially our kids. We continue to balance health and safety strategies with student mental and emotional health and academic growth. As we continue to work alongside our local health networks and receive updates from the CDC, Pennsylvania Department of Health and the



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Pennsylvania Department of Education, we promise to keep you apprised of any changes or updates.

Finally, we ask all families and staff to be cautious during this time. Please stay home if you are feeling ill. If you are eligible, please consult with your health care provider about getting vaccinated. We are offering a vaccination clinic at Parkland High School on August 25th from 1-3 PM for anyone 12 and older with registration occurring at [this link](#). Be mindful of surroundings when traveling. We encourage masking for those unvaccinated. Our best chance at a pre-pandemic school year will be for all of us to be diligent in continuing our fight against COVID-19 and working together to help make this a great school year and one that resumes some normalcy and routine back into all of our lives.