

School City of East Chicago

COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN



2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

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OVERVIEW

School City of East Chicago successfully completed the 2020-21 School Year during the COVID-19 pandemic, following a Reopening Plan that was developed in accordance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the State of Indiana, the Indiana Department of Education, and the East Chicago Health Department. School City of East Chicago (SCEC) district leadership team consulted with employee groups, parents, community members, and school superintendents locally and nationally to develop this plan. Throughout the school year, the plan was adjusted to meet recommendations and requirements set forth by health officials.

As SCEC prepares for the 2021-22 School Year, the plan has been amended to reflect the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will serve as a guiding document for school operations.

Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SCEC district leadership team reserves the right to make necessary changes in the plan. SCEC will continue to update staff, families, and the community as changes are made.

A. RESPONSE MODEL

School City of East Chicago will base its decisions about operations and mitigation strategies on the level of COVID spread in East Chicago, as announced by the Indiana Department of Health and East Chicago Health Department. When a level change occurs, SCEC will provide timely information to all families and staff. The current level will be posted on the SCEC website.

B. INSTRUCTION

School City of East Chicago will return to full-time, in-person instruction five days a week for all students. All SCEC Schools will reopen and welcome students into buildings on the first day of school (August 16, 2021). SCEC will follow the approved school calendar, which is available on the district website.

Due to medical reasons, SCEC acknowledges that some families may feel that a remote learning option is a better fit for their children. We will address this on an as needed basis. All students will be provided with opportunities to receive instruction and complete missed assignments due to illness or quarantine. Take-home materials and/or synchronous online learning will be provided at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

For information about school absence due to illness, please consult the SCEC school handbook for your child's grade level.

C. HEALTH AND SAFETY

General Health Protocols

- SCEC will follow **Indiana State Department of Health** guidance for school building openings.
- SCEC will practice **physical distancing**. This means spacing of 3 feet or greater between individuals, whenever possible.
- **Masks/Face Coverings**
 - SCEC will follow the recommendations/requirements of local, state, and federal health departments regarding face masks. (Currently, per CDC guidance for schools, face masks are recommended indoors for all individuals).
 - Masks are not required for recess and other outdoor activities, if you can physically distance.
 - SCEC will follow federal and state guidelines regarding mask wearing on **school buses**. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.)

- **Masks/Face Coverings (Continued)**
 - SCEC will supply a face covering to any individual who requests one. Cloth face coverings should be laundered each day they are worn.
 - Some students and staff may have medical conditions that limit their ability to wear a face covering. SCEC will work with these individuals to create an accommodation or modification that meets the needs of their disability and the safety of the school environment. Medical documentation of such conditions will be required.
- **Handwashing** will be emphasized multiple times a day for all staff and all students, PreK-12.
- **Hand sanitizer stations** will be available at building entrance and common areas such as cafeterias. Hand sanitizers will be available in each classroom.
- **Signage** and posters will be displayed throughout each school building to remind students and staff of good hygiene habits and other precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- SCEC encourages all students/parents, staff, and visitors to **assess their health** before leaving home each morning.
- **If necessary, temperature checks** may become a component of the COVID-19 screening process for both students and staff.

Considerations for Exclusion

- Students/staff will be **excluded from school** if they test positive for COVID-19 or exhibit one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19, based on Indiana State Department of Health guidance, that is otherwise not explained. As of 8/01/21 this guidance includes the following symptoms:
 - Temperature 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, or chills
 - Sore throat
 - New uncontrolled cough or shortness of breath that causes difficulty breathing (for individuals with chronic allergic/ asthmatic cough, a change in their cough from baseline)
 - Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, or abdominal pain
 - New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever
 - New loss of taste or smell
- Staff and students who are ill with **symptoms of COVID-19** should seek medical attention for further evaluation and instructions. This includes individuals who are fully vaccinated. [The Indiana State Department of Health website](#) has a list of testing facilities, their location, and hours of operation. This list is updated frequently. SCEC will not administer COVID-19 tests at school.

- Students and employees who are not vaccinated should remain home if **someone in the household has a confirmed case of COVID-19.**
- When SCEC is made aware of a confirmed positive case involving a student or staff member, those who have experienced symptoms should get tested and may return after day 14 of quarantine and are symptom free without medications.

Return After Exclusion

- Once a student or employee is excluded from the school environment, they may **return** if they satisfy the recommendations of the ISDH **or are released by a healthcare provider.**
- Individuals who are a close contact of a COVID-positive individual will not need to quarantine if they are vaccinated or **if they have had COVID in the last 90 days.**
- SCEC will follow current **ISDH Guidelines for Return to School.**

D. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Cleaning and Sanitation

Cleaning, disinfection, and sanitation will be performed in partnership with SCEC's custodial department.

- All buildings will be thoroughly cleaned prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and the return to in-person instruction. All non-essential items should be removed from classrooms and other areas occupied by students to aid in cleaning and sanitization efforts.
- Nightly disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces in rooms that were used during the day will take place. High-touch areas include:
 - Doorknobs
 - Light switches
 - Phones
 - Desks
 - Restroom sinks and toilets
 - Media centers
 - Weight rooms
 - Locker rooms
 - etc.

- In addition to nightly cleaning, COVID-19 will require SCEC staff to conduct **frequent cleanings** throughout the school day.
- **Emergency cleaning** will occur in situations where a known infection is connected to a SCEC facility. Depending on the size or complexity of the area requiring emergency cleaning, a room or facility may need to be closed. Details of the closure will be communicated to all appropriate stakeholders.

Cafeterias

- **Breakfast and lunch** items will be “grab and go” for consumption in elementary, middle and high school classrooms. At the middle/high school levels, lunch will be consumed in cafeterias or other large spaces identified by school administration.
- Students will be **prohibited from sharing** food.
- Cafeterias will be **cleaned** after student use.
- No food may be brought in for student parties, etc. and **outside food** may not be delivered for students.

Classrooms

- Student **desks and seats** will face the same direction in the classroom, where possible.
- All classes will have **assigned seating**. This will assist in contact tracing in the event there is a case of COVID-19.
- Dividers will be available to create **physical barriers** in all classrooms.

Nurse’s Offices

- **Nurses offices** will be relocated from main office areas as possible, and/or isolation spaces will be established for students and staff who are sick with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Nurses and any other staff caring for sick students will be required to wear **personal protective equipment** (PPE) including gloves and face coverings.

Restrooms

- Restrooms will be **cleaned frequently and resupplied** throughout the day.
- The **number of students** in the restroom at any given time will be limited.
- Students will be educated on **procedures** for restroom areas, including physical distancing and handwashing.
- Bathroom checklist.

School Buses

- SCEC will follow federal and state guidelines regarding **face coverings/masks** on school buses. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.) This includes extra-curricular activities. Students without masks will be provided with one before boarding a school bus.
- All students will be seated in a manner to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- Buses will be **cleaned and sanitized** before and after student use.

School Offices & Visitors

- Plexiglass **barriers** will be in place in reception areas at all buildings.
- **Visitors** who must enter the school (for example, to pick up a student) must report to the main office. Masks are required for all visitors.
- **Classroom, extracurricular, and parent volunteers** must wear a face mask at all times and practice physical distancing.

Other

- Each building will designate **entry points** for students.
- **Water fountains will remain out of service.** Elementary students are encouraged to bring their own water (water bottles should be clearly labeled with student name). Secondary students will be given a bottle of water in the morning and afternoon on a daily basis.
- **Field trips** may be limited, based on the level of COVID spread in the community.
- **Extracurricular activities** can take place at schools, providing that physical distancing guidelines can be observed. Please visit the SCEC Athletics Website for guidance and information regarding high school sports.
- Any outside groups using **SCEC facilities** will be required to cover the cost of disinfecting. Outside groups will have to follow SCEC's policies and protocols regarding COVID-19.
- **The SCEC Uniform Policy** will be in place for the 2021-22 school year.

E. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Staff will receive **updates and training** regarding COVID-19.
- SafeSchools **training** videos on COVID-19 protocols and precautions will be mandatory for all new staff to view.

F. MENTAL HEALTH

SCEC understands the importance of mental health and the role that it plays in the lives of our students, staff, and families. We are supporting the mental health of stakeholders by providing resources, services, and professional development opportunities.

All schools are staffed by a school counselor and/or school social worker. If a student or staff need assistance, they should reach out to their school social worker for assistance.

G. ATTENDANCE

- Attendance data for all staff and students will be **monitored** daily. Indiana law requires school districts to report to the local health department and the Indiana Department of Education when the percentage of student absences is above 20% of the enrolled students at a school. In addition, all positive cases of COVID-19 will be reported to the Indiana State Department of Health and East Chicago Health Department for school closure guidance and potential contact tracing.
- SCEC attendance personnel will request specific symptom information when **absences are reported** along with COVID-19 diagnoses and/or potential COVID-19 exposure. Information obtained will be shared with nursing staff.
- A SCEC student absent from school due to COVID-19 related symptoms will be recorded as an **“illness/medical quarantine”** absence. If a student is not ill but circumstances require the student to quarantine, the student’s attendance will be recorded as a **“quarantine”** absence. An absence due to quarantining will be considered an “excused” absence from school.
- If a student or staff member has COVID-19 or is quarantined because of COVID-19 related symptoms or contact tracing and is being tested, any other SCEC students or staff members within the **household** should also stay home for the duration of the quarantine period.
- Any student who is at home due to COVID-19 is to remain current with his/her **school work**.
- **Employees** who experience COVID-19 symptoms at work will immediately be sent home. Unvaccinated employees who have had a known exposure to someone testing positive for COVID-19 should consult with physician and request release to work documentation.
- Since vaccines are readily available, staff will be required to **use accumulated benefit days** for any COVID-19 related absences.

H. COMMUNICATIONS

- SCEC will provide accurate and timely information to all stakeholders about measures being taken to help keep students and staff safe.
- SCEC will maintain a dashboard on its website to report data on the number of COVID-19 cases in the district.
- SCEC will stress with all students and staff the importance of staying home when sick.
- Due to federal privacy measures, it is important to note that the name(s) of any student or staff who test positive for COVID-19 will not be identified in communications.
- SCEC will emphasize the importance of vaccination for all age groups as soon as they are eligible.
- SCEC will publicize guidelines and tailor specific messages for staff and students regarding decreasing the risk of exposure, including the use of face coverings, frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, and physical distancing.
- SCEC will educate families on their important role and responsibilities, including:
 - Students should stay home when sick;
 - Emergency contact information must be up to date;
 - Families should plan for the potential need to pick up students from school;
 - Best practices for quarantine/isolation and home care

RESOURCES

- Indiana State Department of Health: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov>
- Indiana State Department of Health Decision Tree: Vaccinated/Unvaccinated Guidance
https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/21_Decision%20Trees_Vac_7.14.pdf

