

## **Billings Public School District Safe Return to School and Continuity of Services Plan**

Date of Original Adoption: Mar. 25, 2020

Date Plan was Last Revised: Jun. 20, 2022

Next Regularly Scheduled Month for Consideration (At least quarterly): Dec 2022

Dates Reviewed: Multiple dates see timelines below

### **January 2022**

As Billings Public Schools returned from the winter holiday break, the Yellowstone County community experienced a swift increase of the Omicron variant causing a rapid increase of COVID cases impacting SD2 schools, staff, and students. In a communique on January 13th, Superintendent Upham outlined the following points to all stakeholders as the decision to continue with the current masking requirements was announced:

- Reiterated the weekly Masking Evaluation Process, publicly released on Sept. 2, 2021
- Called for refocused efforts in optimizing the district's ability to continue providing critical in-person instruction and extracurricular activities by practicing social distancing, frequent hand washing, and masking when appropriate.
- Provided planning for temporary remote instructional settings due to student and/or staff illnesses that included communications from the building principal for checking out technology and resources, and access to a daily Grab and Go breakfast and lunch provided by the district's contracted food service provider.

### **February 2022**

In a communique dated Feb 9, 2022, Superintendent Upham announced the lifting of the mandatory face covering requirement as a result of the district experiencing a sharp decline in COVID cases and in conjunction with improved attendance rates for both students and staff.

Effective end of the day, Friday, Feb 11, 2022 face coverings became optional though encouraged in school facilities, while still required on transportation, per the federal mandate. The district communicated that N-95 masks would remain available to students and staff who chose to continue wearing face coverings.

### **March 2022**

On February 25, 2022 the CDC announced updated requirements for face coverings on buses and vans operated by public or private school systems. In a communique on March 1st, Superintendent Upham announced that Billings Public Schools would implement optional face coverings for all students and staff members involved with school district transportation.

## **April to May 2022**

Close monitoring on a week-by-week basis continued throughout the remainder of the school year, especially around tournament seasons and post-spring break. In the last few months, the school board has created a sub-committee for Safety. Stakeholder meetings over the last few months have included:

- Greg and health officials communicated weekly
- Monthly principal meetings
- Updates to the board of trustees on a weekly basis via email
- Monthly updates at the Board of Trustees meetings (see dates below)
- April Leadership Support Team meetings to prepare and plan for summer school protocols, summer essential worker designations, addressing learning gaps due to Covid

## **June 2022**

Board of Trustees meeting on June 20th for review of the last 6 months and begin considerations for the opening and start of the next school year 2022-2023.

## **Update Dec. 17, 2021**

Over the last six months, Billings Public Schools has monitored and reviewed the plan on a monthly basis. With the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the district and Board of Trustees have established a regular standing agenda item for the plan with public comments. The district has received hundreds of individual public comments regarding the District's reopening plan with the mask mandate in effect.

Since the school year started, the District has worked closely with local health officials to monitor city and county Covid-19 numbers on a weekly basis. School District 2's numbers each week mirrored the Delta variant trends for Yellowstone County. The Fall of 2021 saw a greater number of cases among both staff and students than compared to the Fall of 2020. The peak of the outbreak due to Delta variants peaked in November 2021 and has continued to trend downward since. The District completed its December 2021 (6 month review) and once again opened up the monthly Board of Trustee's meeting for public comment, and discussed the potential of lifting the mask mandate sometime in January 2022 if the numbers continue on its current trend of decline.

In the last month, a new variant (Omicron) has been identified world-wide, but its impact and presence is still unknown for Yellowstone County at the time of this update.

## March 2020 - December 2021

1. The Billings Public School District was ordered to close to in person instruction on March 15, 2020, under an executive order issued by then-Governor Bullock. Districts were provided a two week period of time during which they could remain fully closed to instruction of any kind while developing a plan for remote instruction required by the Governor.
  - a. Although our district was authorized to remain closed, we quickly mobilized and began remote instruction during the timeframe when we were authorized to remain closed.
2. On April 22, 2020, then-Governor Bullock lifted his Stay at Home Order, and Announced a Plan to Begin Phased Reopening of Montana. As part of that plan, effective May 7, 2020, all schools were provided the option to return to in-classroom teaching at the discretion of local school boards.
  - a. Our school district finished the 2019-20 school year through remote instruction.
3. Our district developed a plan for reopening to in person instruction, with contingencies, and we implemented that plan for the 2020-21 school year. The reopening plan, details regarding which are provided below, included adoption of various model policies provided by the Montana School Boards Association under its 1900 Series, including model policies aligned with CDC guidance regarding mitigation strategies to limit exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 in school settings.
  - a. During the 2020-21 school year, our means of operation have included the option between:
    - i. In person
    - ii. Offsite Remote Learning
  - b. The only exception during this timeframe was for temporary closures of part or all of in classroom teaching pursuant to quarantine or isolation orders issued by our county department of health.
4. Our district finished the 2020-21 school year strong, having provided high quality learning opportunities to the students in our community in safe and effective learning environments.
5. We embraced a fundamental principle of providing extensive transparency to our community throughout the above timeframe. We publicly noticed, held meetings regarding, and provided extensive opportunities for our community to provide us with feedback regarding the School District's plans and we carefully considered such feedback in developing and refining the School District's plans throughout the last 14-15 months.

All school board and committee meetings (regular and special) were made available online to the public via FaceBook Live and public comments were available to be submitted to the superintendent and/or the school board of trustees through its usual email, phone, or mail processes. The superintendent hosted multiple virtual Facebook Live Q&A with parents, students, and community members throughout the last 12 to 14 months. The superintendent also hosted virtual Student Summits with all of the district's high schools to allow

for input from the student body. Most of these were recorded and are available online. Once the school board meetings returned to an in-person mode, the Lincoln Center Auditorium was made available to the public to come watch the live feed, and/or submit public comments live on camera.

## **Safe Return to Schools and Continuity of Services Plan Contents:**

### **March 2020- December 2021**

#### **Part I: Documentation of Meaningful Consultation in Developing and Refining the School District's plan from March 2020 Through December 2021:**

We noticed, held, and invited public comment on our evolving plans for a safe return to school and continuity of services on the following dates since March 2020:

1. 2020 March 16, 17, 19, 23, 25, 30
2. 2020 April 6, 13, 20, 27
3. 2020 May 4, 11, 18
4. 2020 June 1, 15 and July 20, 29
5. 2020 Aug. 17, Sept. 21, Oct. 19, Nov. 16, and Dec. 21
6. 2021 Jan. 25, Feb. 22, Mar. 15, April 19, May 17, June 21, July 19, Aug 16, Sep 20, Oct 18, and Nov 15
7. 2022 Jan. 24, Feb. 28, Mar. 21, April 18, May 16 - May23, June 20

Our invitation for public input included a general opportunity for the public to provide input and was provided to everyone interested, including:

1. Students; families; school and district administrators (including special education administrators); teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions; and
2. Members of our local community stakeholders representing the interests of: Businesses, Tribes; children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.
3. A full list of the meetings, their agendas and adopted minutes can be found at the following weblink:  
<https://www.billingssschools.org/board/agendas-minutes>

#### **Part II: Contents of The School District's plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services:**

The following is a description of how the district maintains the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff:

Following the lifting of the Stay-at-Home Order and subsequent reopening of the state on April 22, 2020, Billings Public School District utilized multiple resources from the federal, state, and local levels including, but not limited to the Federal and State Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Yellowstone City-County Health Department, Riverstone

Health, The Billings Clinic, and the Montana Public Education Center *Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana's Public Schools Using Emergency School District Policies* and accompanying MTSBA Model Emergency Policies. Utilizing these resources supported our district's continued service to students with transparency and accountability while ensuring the operations of the school district reflected the circumstances in our community.

The Billings Public Schools Board of Trustees and school leaders honored the following priorities: quality instruction to students; a healthy and safe setting for students, staff, and the community; needed support of teachers and staff; and responsible financial and operational procedures. The resources provided an actionable plan for completing the 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 school fiscal year in a manner that met these priorities and secured district funding while providing an operational platform for considering long term innovations in the delivery of education services.

Billings Public School District implemented emergency policy options that facilitated collaboration between the Board of Trustees, administrative team, employees, parents, students, health officials, and community as we established protocols aligned with CDC guidance addressing how instruction was to be delivered to students; how gatherings and events would take place on school property; how the health and safety of staff and students would be protected and preserved while schools were open; and how financial and operational functions of the school district would continue during the period of public health emergency.

Billings Public School District reviewed, considered, and addressed numerous areas of operation in our reopening process. On the topic of school district policy and procedures, the district considered emergency policies and procedures, adoption and amendment of policies, suspension of policies, and administrative procedures. To support students' academic, mental, social and emotional success, the district considered alternative grading, counseling, extended school year, student instruction proficiency determinations and declarations, support for particularly vulnerable students, transportation services, access to internet for students, food preparation and service, summer school and additional student instruction resources. To ensure the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff, the district considered cleaning and disinfection, community use of facilities, county board of health orders, diagnosis and confidentiality, hand washing and related hygiene protocols, telework, school closure orders, stay at home orders, symptom monitoring and isolation, travel quarantines, visitors, volunteers, vulnerable individuals, masks and personal protective equipment, and physical distancing.

Billings Public School District has remained in compliance with guidance and best practices provided by federal, state, or local health officials. Our school district has continued to adapt and adjust our policies as new and updated guidance and best practices have become available.

Further, the emergency policies and procedures provide options for consideration through input from our board of trustees, administrative team, employees, parents, student health officials, and community as collaborative partners as we have worked our

way through ever evolving changes due to the pandemic. By considering all possible perspectives and factors when making the decisions to adopt or adjust a policy, or to implement a policy, we focused on the health and safety of our students, staff, and community for delivery of learning and services to our students. The emergency policies and procedures have enabled us to adjust our procedures and practices during different phases in compliance with guidance and best practices provided by federal, state, and local agencies.

Billings Public School District will continue to follow the policies noted below while engaging in a quarterly reevaluation process to continue to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our students, teachers, staff, and community through 2024.

1. The extent to which the district has drafted and adopted plans, emergency policies and procedures, and a description of any such policies, as well as a general timeline of these events are listed below. For more detailed information on each plan can be found in the attached documents and/or can be found in the posted agenda/minutes of the school board meetings:

March 16, 2020 – Regular Board Meeting as scheduled. John Felton (Riverstone Health) presented to the board information only about Covid-19. Notified public of special meetings to happen as more information becomes available.

March 17, 2020 – Special Board Meeting. Took action and approved **DECLARATION OF UNFORESEEN EMERGENCY** - Motion for the board of trustees of the Billings School District to declare an unforeseen emergency in accordance with Sections 20-9-801 through 20-9-806, MCA, due to the community and school health concerns related to covid-19 and authorize administration to take necessary steps to execute this declaration and inform the public and government agencies of this declaration.

March 17, 19, 23, and 25 2020 – During these consecutive Special Board Meetings, District Executive Directors presented for information only, multiple proposals related to remote learning plans and resources to support students and families to finish out the 2019-20 school year.

March 25, 2020 – Special Board Meeting – Considered and took action to approve **CONSIDERATION AND ACTION ON THE DISTRICT'S COVID-19 EDUCATION ACTION PLAN FOR SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE** -

An Education Action Plan for Billings Public Schools has been designed to comply with Governor Bullock's directive on March 19th which instructed school districts to plan for and implement the following:

1. Offsite learning instruction and structure.
2. School meals, consistent with what the District regularly provides.

3. Services for students with disability; and
4. Other services customarily provided to students.

Once the Education Action Plan was approved by Trustees, the Governor, in consultation with OPI, approved the plan and waive requirements for pupil instruction.

March 30, April 6, 13, 20, 2020 - Ongoing meeting the provided opportunities for public input as planning was presented for information only.

April 27, 2020 – Special Board Meeting – Considered and took action to approve **Local Control of School Closure Beginning May 7, 2020** - After the Governor's school closure ends on May 6th, it is up to the Board to determine whether the District's schools remain closed or reopen. The board's decision was to leave the schools closed pursuant to the District's Education Action Plan adopted by the Board on March 25, 2020 based on the motion: "I move that the Board declare an unforeseen emergency within the meaning of that term as set forth in Title 20, Chapter 9, Part 8, to become immediately effective and to continue through June 30, 2020. This motion is based on COVID-19 risks; in recognition that the Governor's waiver of student instruction time will expire on May 7; and in recognition that the Governor's April 22, 2020, Directive implicating Executive Orders 2-2020 and 3-2020 specifies that elected school boards and their districts that adopt their own declaration of emergency will continue to receive all state funding, including transportation funding."

April 27, 2020 – Special Board Meeting – In addition to the prior action item, the board of trustees decided to not adjourn the Covid-19 related Special Board Meetings, but to postpone with a **Continuance** until a later date.

June 1, 2020 – Continuance of Special Board Meetings Related to Covid-19 Issues - Considered and took action to approve **Appendment of April 27<sup>th</sup> on Local Control of School Closure Beginning May 7, 2020 Action Item** - The motion is based on the Superintendent's request for the Board to modify its April 27, 2020, declaration to end not on June 30, 2020, but instead on June 1, 2020. This will permit the District to prepare for [in-person] summer education programs, as well as planning ahead to August [and in-person options].

July 20, 2020 – Regular Board Meeting – The Superintendent presented for information only the various plans for re-opening schools for the 2020-21 school year based on input from stakeholders across the district. These plans were then vetted through various online events that allowed for general public input and comments for a final plan to be presented at the ongoing special meeting of the board on July 29, 2020.

July 29, 2020 - Continuance of Special Board Meetings Related to Covid-19 Issues –

For Information Only – Superintendent Upham reviewed the Draft **Guiding Document**

## **for Reopening of Schools During Pandemic with the Trustees.**

The board considered and took action to approve a **DECLARATION OF UNFORESEEN EMERGENCY** related to the pandemic - Motion for the board of trustees of the Billings School District to declare an unforeseen emergency in accordance with Sections 20-9-801 through 20-9-806, MCA, due to the community and school health concerns related to covid-19 and authorize administration to take necessary steps to execute this declaration and inform the public and government agencies of this declaration.

August 17, 2020 – Regular Board Meeting – For information only and providing continued public input on the 2020-21 re-opening plan. Regular Board Meetings continued to allow for input on the current school year’s re-opening plan, but no changes or board action was made during the September, October, November, and December 2020 meetings, and continued into 2021 unless noted below.

January 25, 2021 – Regular Board Meeting – The board considered and approved the temporary suspension of Policy 1310 with a unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees. The Board then considered the proposed new emergency Policy 1905 **Face Coverings as Personal Protective Equipment** which was developed with the conjunction of the MTSBA for this period through the Covid virus. The policy mandates the wearing of masks with many Yellowstone county schools and the other AA Districts approving this policy. This policy was reviewed by the legal team and mandates that all must wear a mask while in school buildings. The motion passed unanimously.

The School District has adopted the protocols outlined in this policy during the term of the declared public health emergency to ensure the safe and healthy delivery of education services provided to students on school property in accordance with Policy 1905, and a safe workplace when staff are present on school property in accordance with Policy 1905, and the safety, health and well-being of parents and community members. The supervising teacher, principal, superintendent or designated personnel are authorized to implement the protocols in coordination with state and local health officials. The policy establishes regulations requiring face coverings as personal protective equipment.

## **May/June 2021**

### **Part III – Updated Compliance for the District’s Previously Adopted Plan for the Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services:**

Section 2001(i)(3) of the ARP Act states that a school district that developed a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services prior to the date of enactment of the ARP Act will be deemed to have met the requirement to develop a plan under section 2001(i)(1) as long as the plan meets the statutory requirements (*i.e.*, is publicly available on the LEA's website and was developed after the LEA sought and took into account public comment).

The School District’s plan meets the requirements of Section 2001(i)(1) and (i)(2) of the ARP Act. The School District’s plan is available on our website and, as

noted above, was developed through a process that included extensive public comment. Further, we have, as part of the organization of the School District's plan for purposes of the ARP Act, begun a revision process of the School District's plan for purposes of an extended K-12 Summer School Program and for the opening of the 2021-2022 school year, while focusing on student data and stakeholder input that included not just a notice of opportunity for public input but which specifically invited meaningful consultation with and input from:

1. Students; families; school and district administrators (including special education administrators); teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions; and
2. Members of our local community stakeholders representing the interests of: Businesses, Tribes; children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.

We are currently considering the input of all affected parties and are carefully deliberating with state and county health officials regarding the best possible means by which our district can provide safe effective learning environments for each of our students this summer and into the new school year.

In May 2021, the Yellowstone City-County Health Department through the Riverstone Health offices provided the county's school superintendents with a memo that outlines guiding principles for local school districts to consider in their plans for the new school year. This memo, among other information, will help inform the development of the district's Safe Return to Schools and Continuity of Services Plan for the 2021-2022 school year. [see attached memo dated May 26, 2021]

## **July 2021 - September 30, 2024**

### **Part IV – Schedule for Future Review and Updates:**

In consideration of this Safe Return to Schools and Continuity of Services Plan, Billings Public Schools shall add as a standing agenda item on each regular and Covid-Related special meeting of the board of trustees throughout the 2021-24 school years. The agenda item shall, at a minimum, include notice of any changes to the plan recommended by the administration with an invitation for input, notice of opportunity for public input, and consultation with:

1. Students; families; school and district administrators (including special education administrators); teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions; and
2. Members of our local community stakeholders representing the interests of: Businesses, Tribes; children with disabilities, English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, and other underserved students.

Members of the public are encouraged to visit this website on an ongoing and regular basis for upcoming meeting dates, public notices, and agenda/minutes.

**Appendix – Attach and/or provide a website URL for the school district’s adopted 1900 policies in their entirety.**

**[MT-PEC](#) *A Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana’s Public Schools Using Emergency School District Policies.***