

Safe Return to In-Person Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted and changed our lives in countless ways. Through our Safe Return to In-Person Learning plans, South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) is committed to providing a safe, effective and inclusive learning environment for our students and staff.

2021-22 Safe Return to Learning

With the [Minnesota Safe Learning Plan](#) guidance expiring at the end of the 2020-21 school year and no new guidance currently issued, SSPPS, like many districts across the state, are planning to return to many of their pre-pandemic protocols and procedures. For SSPPS, this means:

In-Person Learning

Prek-12 students will attend school in-person at 100% capacity this fall. With no Safe Learning Plan in place from the state, SSPPS is unable to offer a distance learning option for families like we did during the 2020-21 school year. If the state issues new guidance allowing districts to offer distance learning, SSPPS will begin exploring options for families.

Online School Update

In May, SSPPS surveyed families gauging their interest in a comprehensive, fully accredited K-12 Online School option. Unfortunately the interest level was not enough to offer an online option for students in grades K-9. SSPPS is continuing to explore options with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) for an online learning opportunity for students in grades 10-12. Updates will be provided to our high school families as we learn more from MDE.

Face Coverings

Following current guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), SSPPS recommends but does not require face coverings in our schools and facilities. However, the CDC and SSPPS still require face coverings for everyone on all district provided transportation at all times. SSPPS will change or modify face covering requirements if new CDC or state guidance is issued.

Quarantines

SSPPS will continue to follow the guidance from MDH for all COVID-19 exposures. In accordance with current CDC guidelines, only people who test positive for COVID and their unvaccinated household members will be required to quarantine.

Sanitizing

SSPPS will continue to thoroughly clean our schools after each school day. Hand sanitizer stations will still be available and everyone is recommended to continue practicing good hand hygiene.

With the uncertainty of how the COVID-19 pandemic will change and evolve in the coming months, SSPPS will continue to make necessary adjustments to our daily practices and protocols per CDC and/or state guidance. We will notify families as soon as possible of any changes. SSPPS will also continue to update this page as details are finalized for the 2021-22 school year.

2020-21 School Year In-Review

The spring of 2020 brought unprecedented changes to our society and our education system. South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) shifted to 10-weeks of Distance Learning, providing Emergency School Meals and Emergency School Care.

In June of 2020, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) released the [2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#). The guidance led school districts across the state to plan for the following three scenarios for the 2020-21 school year:

- Scenario 1: **In-person** learning for all students
- Scenario 2: **Hybrid learning** with strict social distancing and capacity limits
- Scenario 3: **Distance learning** for all students

All families also had the option to choose full-time distance learning if they preferred to keep their children home for medical reasons or if they are simply uncomfortable with sending them to school.

Throughout the summer of 2020, SSPPS district leaders studied the extensive school guidance and began designing comprehensive plans to meet the needs of each and every learner, while being sensitive to the difficulties and challenges faced by families, students, and staff. District leaders developed an overarching [2020-21 Safe.Strong.Prepared.](#) document based the [state's guidance](#) and the following guiding principles:

Guiding Principles

- **Safety:** Student and staff safety is our top priority in our planning.
- **Flexibility:** With the uncertainty and continued changing landscape, the district's plans will build in flexibility, so we're prepared to adjust based on the needs of stakeholders and changes to medical circumstances and public health guidance.
- **High Quality Instruction:** As they return, students will need the support of both high quality instruction and strong social and emotional behavior support systems.
- **Accurate and Timely Communication:** All students, employees and families will be provided safety details and we will keep all stakeholders up-to-date with important information throughout the year.
- **Data and Decision Making:** Our decisions will continue to be informed by health data, funding, workforce and educational agency guidance with feedback from families, students, employees and community members.
- **Educational Equity:** All students will be provided with quality grade-level instruction and social-emotional support, with a focus on removing and ending racist practices.

Minnesota Safe Learning Plan

On July 30, 2020 Governor Walz, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) released the [Minnesota Safe Learning Plan](#), a localized, data-driven approach to the 2020-21 school year to help students learn safely.

The Safe Learning Plan outlined steps school districts should take when considering what learning scenario – distance, hybrid or in-person – they should implement to start the school year. Districts consulted with MDH and MDE to review their county health data, district factors such as building capacity and safe learning plans prior to selecting their learning plan to start the school year with.

Part of the Minnesota Safe Learning Plan included a matrix for determining which learning model districts could use, based on the number of cases per 10,000 over the past 14 days, by county (see graphic below). This matrix is meant to be used as a **starting place** for districts as they begin the consultative process. **The decision is complex and must balance not only the current COVID-19 cases in our county (Dakota), but input from our community and staff, and the operational implications such as staffing and busing within the recommended guidelines.**

Number of cases per 10,000 over 14 days, by county of residence	Learning model
0-9	In-person learning for all students
10-19	In-person learning for elementary students Hybrid learning for secondary students
20-29	Hybrid learning for all students
30-49	Hybrid learning for elementary students Distance learning for secondary students
50+	Distance learning for all students

SSPPS Safe Return to Learning Plan

After reviewing the county health data with the MDH and MDE, the SSP School Board approved, on August 10, 2020, to open the 2020-21 school year in the hybrid model with a [four-week soft opening plan](#). District leaders created the following detailed site/program plans for each of the three learning models to support the District's overarching [Safe.Strong.Prepared.](#) Document:

- Preschool
 - [Safety Plan](#)

- Kaposia Education Center (K-5)
 - Distance Learning
 - [Hybrid](#)
 - In-Person
- Lincoln Center Elementary (K-5)
 - Distance Learning
 - [Hybrid](#)
 - In-Person
- Middle School (6-8)
 - Distance Learning
 - [Hybrid](#)
 - In-Person
- High School/CLC (9-12)
 - Distance Learning
 - [Hybrid](#)
 - In-Person

As the pandemic continued to change and evolve and state guidance updated, SSPPS adapted plans and shifted between the three learning models of distance learning, hybrid, and in-person learning throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Learning Preference

On August 6, 2021, SSPPS communicated with families asking them to complete a [Student Learning Preference for Fall 2020](#) survey selecting either hybrid or a full distance learning option for each of their students to start the 2020-21 school year in. Their learning preferences would remain in effect through Thanksgiving where families would have an opportunity to select new learning models for their students. SSPPS remained flexible and shifted students between learning models in order to ensure the success of each student.

2020-21 School-Age Care

Equitable and Affordable school-age child care programs are essential to support working families and provide enrichment and care for students. Following guidance from the state, SSPPS provided school-age care for district-enrolled children in grades K-6 (age 12 and under) who were children of critical care workers in Tier I, as defined by the state. This care was offered at no cost during the time those children are not receiving instruction in the school building during regular school hours. These families may also opt for before/after school care for a fee.

School-Age Care registration for all other families *not falling into the Tier I category*, may be made available for a fee if the district has not reached capacity limits.

- **Tier I Critical Care Workers as defined by the state:**
 - Healthcare and public health
 - Law enforcement, public safety and first responders
 - Food and agriculture
 - Judicial Branch (essential services)
 - National Guard (activated under a Governor Executive Order)
 - Educators and school staff providing in-person instruction or caring for children of critical workers
 - Child care and school-age care providers

School Meals

South St. Paul Schools provided school meals in accordance with the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program during the 2020-21 school year. School meals were available at no charge to students enrolled in SSP this fall through the remainder of the school year. Funding for the meals comes from the USDA (Federal) Summer Food Service Program.

Students attending full in-person learning received meals, at no charge, in their classroom. In-person students notified their teacher at the beginning of the day if they needed a hot lunch. Lunch was served in individually wrapped selections or it was pre-plated.

Distance Learning Families received one box of food each week containing five days of meals (breakfast and lunch). Families picked up their meal boxes at the high school each Wednesday from 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM and 3:30 - 5:30 PM.

Families were also encouraged to complete an Application for Educational Benefits. Qualifying families had the ability to receive household discounts throughout the state such as wireless service, energy assistance, etc. Qualifying families would also have access to the [Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer \(P-EBT\)](#) which helped provide families with additional support.

SSPPS Preparedness Plan for Employees

SSPPS is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for employees, students and families. In June of 2020, an Employee Pandemic Advisory Committee was formed to help address workplace safety and health issues related to COVID-19. The committee, with representation of various positions throughout the district, provided recommendations and feedback to the superintendent that address workplace safety and health issues related to the COVID-19 and our district's Preparedness Plan. The [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) was developed to identify and explain procedures, practices and protocols to help ensure we have a safe and healthy workplace, and help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in our school communities.

South St. Paul School – Safe Return Public Input

Staying connected with our students, staff and families is always an important part of our work in SSPPS. Connecting and learning from our stakeholders was especially critical as the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to adjust our school opening plans, schedules, and our day-to-day work to ensure we were providing safe and effective learning environments. Learning of the challenges our learning community was facing, helped us adjust and reduce those barriers.

Throughout the past year, we used several methods, such as a [Safe.Strong.Prepared Feedback Survey](#) to help us gather feedback from our stakeholders and really understand their perspectives on what was working well and what needed to make improvements on. The following is a summary of the feedback we received:

2020-21 School Year Feedback Summary

During the 2020-21 school year, we received many types of public comment and feedback. Some of these included:

- Student, staff, and family surveys
- Staff, student and parent meetings
- Incident Command Team meetings
- Public submissions to the school district and school board.

The feedback we received can be categorized into the following areas: health and safety, planning for consistency with flexibility for families, students, and staff, and maximizing in-person opportunities.

Health and Safety:

The feedback we received in this area included: wearing face covering, vaccinations, Covid testing, quarantining, school opening schedules, prom restrictions, and distance learning opportunities.

Planning for consistency with flexibility for families, students, and staff:

The feedback we received in this area included: students' attendance, school learning models and scheduling (not reopening fast enough or re-opening too fast), and academic concerns such as grading and academic performance.

Maximize In-Person Opportunities:

The feedback we received in this area included: emergency childcare, families in need of more childcare, and access to youth sports facility rentals during covid.

Summary:

All of the feedback we received from the families, communities, students, and staff helped to inform the ongoing development of our learning models and district plans.