

## **Safe Return Plan 2024-2025**

### **Maintaining Health and Safety**

#### **A. Wearing of masks**

For the 2024-2025 school year, we will continue to follow the guidance as provided by Governor Murphy's announcement that lifted the mask mandate that required universal masking as of March 7, 2022. The wearing of masks will be optional for all students, staff, teachers, and visitors. This will also include on school buses.

#### **B. Physical Distancing**

The Stafford Township School District has established school policies and interventions to promote the recommended physical distance, suggested by the state and CDC, between staff, students and visitors.

The district will implement physical distancing measures to the extent described in the New Jersey Department of Health regional risk matrix. All instructional and non-instructional rooms in school and district facilities will comply with social distancing standards to the greatest extent practicable:

- Classrooms:
  - To the greatest extent possible, physical distancing between students will be maintained in classrooms.
- Other School Spaces: To the greatest extent possible, the district will maintain physical distancing, in the following situations:
  - Between adults (teachers and staff), and between adults and students, when possible.
  - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band, or sports and exercise. The district will move these activities outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces, when possible.
  - In common areas such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
- Remove nonessential furniture and make other changes to classroom layouts to the greatest extent possible between students.
- Eliminate or decrease nonessential in-person interactions among teachers and staff during meetings, lunches, and other similar situations.
- Visitors: The district will limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities that involve external groups or organizations as much as possible.
- Additional PPE items will be available to any staff or students on an as needed basis.
- Require all visitors to physically distance themselves from others, when possible.

- Create distance between children on school buses, when possible. Open windows to improve ventilation when it does not create a safety hazard. Masks will be optional for students while riding the school bus.
- Consider physical barriers/partitions as an acceptable additional mitigation strategy where feasible.

### **C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette**

Through ongoing health education units and lessons, the Stafford Township School District will teach children proper handwashing as well as reinforce appropriate sanitization behaviors, and provide adequate supplies. The Stafford Township School District will ensure that teachers and staff use proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette.

- The teachers and staff will teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, increase frequency of handwashing and monitoring to ensure adherence among students, teachers, and staff. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol will be used.
- The Stafford Township School District will encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and immediately wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- The district will support healthy hygiene behaviors by providing adequate supplies, including soap, a way to dry hands, tissues, face , and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans. When soap and water are not readily available, the district will provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).
- Assist/observe young children to ensure proper handwashing when possible.

### **D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities**

Stafford Township School District will make changes to physical spaces to maintain a healthy environment and facilities, including improving ventilation and routinely clean high-touch surfaces (such as doorknobs and light switches).

- Ventilation: Stafford Township School District will improve ventilation to the greatest extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. This will be achieved through several actions.
  - Bring in as much outdoor air as possible. If safe to do so, open windows and doors. Even just cracking open a window or door helps increase outdoor airflow, which helps reduce the potential concentration of virus particles in the air.
  - Ensure Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) settings are maximizing ventilation.
  - Filter and/or clean the air in the school by improving the level of filtration as much as possible.
  - Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.

- o Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.
- Modified layouts: To the greatest extent possible, the Stafford Township School District will adjust physical layouts in classrooms and other settings to maximize physical space.
- Cleaning: Stafford Township School District will regularly clean high touch surfaces and objects (for example, playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, toilets, drinking fountains) within the school and on school buses at least daily or between bus routes as much as possible.
- Communal spaces: To the greatest extent possible, the Stafford Township School District will clean regularly and stagger use of shared spaces, such as cafeterias.
- Food service: Stafford Township School District will not utilize self-serve food or drink options such as hot and cold food bars, salad or condiment bars, and drink stations. All food service will be handled by Sodexo employees.

## **E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation**

The Stafford Township School District collaborates with the Ocean County Health Department, to the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, to provide information about individuals diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19. Students, teachers, and staff with positive test results will isolate as recommended by the Local Health Department and CDC.

- Students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms are encouraged to stay home and to contact their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Students, teachers, and staff that are diagnosed with COVID-19 will be separated from others to prevent exposure. Students, teachers, and staff who are in isolation will be required to stay home and follow the direction of the local public health authority about when it is safe for them to return to work/school.
- The District will monitor positive COVID-19 cases for possible outbreaks and work with the local health department to report and monitor cases.

## **F. Diagnostic and screening testing**

### *Diagnostic Testing*

At all levels of community transmission, the Stafford Township School District will recommend diagnostic testing to any student, teacher, or staff member who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 at school. Additional considerations for diagnostic testing:

- The Stafford Township School District will advise students, teachers, and staff to stay home if they are sick or if they have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2. The district will encourage these individuals to talk to their healthcare provider about getting a COVID-19 test.

- If a student, teacher, or staff member becomes sick at school or reports a new COVID-19 diagnosis, the Stafford Township School District will follow the steps outlined by the Ocean County Health Department and New Jersey Department of Education on what to do next. Notifications will be accessible for all students, parents, or guardians, including those with disabilities or limited English proficiency (for example, through use of interpreters or translated materials) via the district COVID-19 dashboard.
- The Stafford Township School District will ensure school-based healthcare professionals have access to, and training on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Ocean County Department of Health officials will work with the Stafford Township School District to help link students and their families, teachers, and staff to opportunities for testing in their community.

The presence of any of the symptoms below generally suggests a student, teacher, or staff member has an infectious illness and should not attend school, regardless of whether the illness is COVID-19. Occurrence of any of the symptoms below while a student, teacher, or staff member is at school suggests the person may be referred for diagnostic testing.

- Temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
- Sore throat
- Cough (for students with chronic cough due to allergies or asthma, a change in their cough from baseline)
- Difficulty breathing (for students with asthma, a change from their baseline breathing)
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

The Stafford Township School District will utilize the New Jersey Department of Health COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix when making determinations related to isolation. The COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix provides data and public health recommendations for local health departments and schools to consider based on the level of COVID-19 transmission in their region.

### *Screening Testing*

The intent is to use screening testing to determine who may remain in-person at school or work and the protective measures that will be taken, and to identify and isolate positive persons to prevent spread.

- Parents and staff will be required to complete a COVID-19 annual waiver on the parent portal prior to the school year and adhere to these requirements.
- Parents will sign a waiver stating that they will check their child(ren) for COVID-19 symptoms daily and if their child is exhibiting any of the symptoms, they will keep their child home. Parents will also sign that they will notify the district if

anyone in their household tests positive for COVID-19. Parents will be asked to report positive cases to schools to facilitate contact tracing and ensure communication and planning in schools.

- Staff will diligently observe students daily for symptoms of COVID-19. The teacher will do a quick visual health check. If one or more symptoms is observed, staff will send the student to the nurse for assessment. Nurses will assess the student and make a determination based on the CDC guidelines and the district physician's standing orders. Students who are believed to be ill will be respectfully isolated from others until picked up by a parent/guardian. Staff members who are believed to be ill will be required to go home immediately. Staff and parents will be encouraged to follow up with his/her physician, and continuously monitor their symptoms.

### **G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators**

Vaccines are an important tool to help stop the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers and staff hold jobs critical to the continued functioning of society and are at potential occupational risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2. Vaccinating teachers and staff is one layer of prevention and protection for teachers and staff. Strategies that minimize barriers to access vaccination for teachers and other frontline essential workers, such as vaccine clinics at or close to the place of work, are optimal.

- Stafford Township School District will share with staff the new CDC resources which are available to provide information about vaccinations:
  - The [COVID-19 Vaccines for Teachers, School Staff, and Childcare Workers](#) web page provides school and childcare staff with the latest information about where and how to book an appointment.
  - The [COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit for School Settings and Childcare Programs](#) provides schools and childcare programs with ready-made materials they can use to communicate with staff about COVID-19 vaccination.
- Stafford Township School District officials will work together with the Ocean County Health Department and New Jersey Department of Education to also support messaging and outreach about vaccination for members of school communities.

### **H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities**

A narrow subset of students with disabilities might not be able to socially distance or follow other public health requirements. Those who cannot safely adhere to these guidelines should not be required to adhere to the guidelines when documented in the student's Individual Education Plan and/or by a medical professional. The district will make individualized determinations as required by Federal disability laws in order to determine if an exception is necessary and appropriate for a particular student. If a child with a disability cannot maintain physical distance or adhere to other public health requirements, the student is still entitled to an appropriate education, which in some

circumstances may need to be provided via homebound instruction as documented by a medical professional.

### **Ensuring Continuity of Services**

The Stafford Township School District will work with teaching staff to adjust pacing guides for all subject areas and identify supplemental resources that can be utilized to close the achievement gap for our students. The district will utilize a researched based assessment (I-Ready) and participate in state assessment to monitor student progress. The district will provide learning acceleration activities that will include summer educational programs, before and/or after school assistance to students, and social, emotional, and mental health needs of our students through our guidance counselors and child study team. We will contract with outside agencies and our health care company to provide social, emotional, and mental health resources for staff to assist with any need that arises. Professional development will be provided to make data easier for all to understand, on growth mindset, and Multi-Tiered System of Support. Review of services will be ongoing.

### **Public Comment**

The Stafford Township School District will continually meet with all of their stakeholders to gain input into the Safe Return Plan.

- Appropriate input received from the stakeholder groups, will be incorporated into the updated plan.
  - a. The district administration will meet on a monthly basis to discuss ideas, procedures, and implementation of the district plan.
  - b. Staff input will be obtained through quarterly meetings with the Stafford Township Education Association, building faculty meetings and certified staff meetings.
  - c. Parent input will be obtained through quarterly PTO meetings and other district meetings, as appropriate.
  - d. The Board of Education and the public's input into the district's Safe Return Plan will be obtained quarterly at Board of Education Committee meetings and during the public comment section of Board Meetings.
- The Stafford Township School District will post the Safe Return Plan on the district website in the necessary languages for our parents/guardians. Any parent/guardian, who has a disability as defined by the ADA, will be provided the plan in an alternative format accessible to that parent, as requested.