



Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

Updated July 27, 2023

On March 13, 2020, Waco ISD announced that its campuses would close for in-person instruction for at least two weeks in response to the emerging global pandemic. Over time, those closures were extended, and all students continued to learn remotely through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

When campuses reopened for the 2020-2021 school year, all students in Waco ISD had the option of learning remotely or in-person. While a majority of families initially selected remote instruction for their students, the number of students learning in person increased with each six-week grading period, and Waco ISD ended the school year with most students back on campus.

For the 2022-2023 school year, all students will continue learning in person as they did last year. This document outlines the steps that district is taking to provide a safe return to in-person instruction and to provide continuity of services in the unlikely event that additional closures are necessary. For people who visited a Waco ISD school in the last two years, many (if not all) of these measures will seem familiar. This plan updates the health and safety measures that have been in place to reflect changes in guidance from the state and local health, executive orders issued by the governor, and public input.

The first iteration of Waco ISD's "Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services" was published on July 28, 2021. This most recently updated plan was published on July 27, 2022. It reflects additional feedback received from stakeholders as well as public health and legal developments throughout the 2021-2022 school year and summer.

Maintaining Health and Safety

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 requires families, employees and the community to work together and starts by knowing the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. The following symptoms may be a sign of COVID-19: fever or chills, cough shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea. If you feel sick or are experiencing any of these symptoms, you should stay home.

Universal and correct wearing of masks

At this time, Waco ISD does not require face masks to be worn in schools and other district facilities. However, correctly wearing a face mask is encouraged in indoor spaces where social

distancing may not be possible. Waco ISD also recommends that students and employees consider following the CDC guidance for masking based on community transmission levels. Anyone who chooses to wear a mask will be supported in doing so.

Modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing

To the extent possible, classrooms have been configured to provide at least 3 feet of physical distance between students. However, the size and layout of classrooms varies across the district, and it may not be possible to maintain at least 3 feet between students in every classroom.

Based on their physical layout, schools have also taken additional steps (like designating one-way hallways and staircases) to maintain social distancing on campus. In some areas where it is not possible to maintain social distance, plexiglass barriers have been installed. Signage is also available to promote social distancing.

Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Frequent hand washing and sanitizing is required. Hand sanitizing stations have been installed in common areas and on buses. Signage has also been added to encourage hand washing and provide instruction on proper hand-washing and hand-sanitizing techniques.

Cleaning and maintaining health facilities, including improving ventilation

Enhanced cleaning and sanitization protocols implemented when campuses reopened in the fall of 2020 remain in place. All campuses are cleaned with a hospital-grade disinfectant daily, and high-touch areas (including restrooms) are disinfected more frequently.

HVAC systems have been adjusted to increase the air exchange rate and fitted with filters that provide a higher level of filtration. Additionally, Waco ISD has allocated \$4.8 million in federal stimulus funding to improve HVAC systems in district facilities.

Monitoring and notification

CDC no longer recommends quarantining for close contact. Waco ISD will continue to monitor transmission levels on campuses and within teams/groups of students. We ask that all students and staff who test positive notify our health services department. Case counts are submitted to the Waco-McLennan County Public Health District each week. If multiple cases occur within a group of students an investigation will occur and we will take the guidance of the local health district regarding notification.

Testing resources

Waco ISD is no longer participating in the COVID-19 rapid and PCR testing program. Campus nurses will give a list of up-to-date testing resources to staff and families as needed. Waco ISD has provided information and will continue to remind families and staff of the free at-home tests that can be ordered through USPS.

Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff and students, if eligible

Since February 2021, Waco ISD partnered with Ascension Providence and, more recently, the Waco-McLennan County Public Health District to host vaccination clinics for employees, students and community members. Details of future clinics will be posted on the district's website and social media accounts. Information will also be provided to employees and students' families via email messages, text messages and/or automated phone calls.

Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies and practices

Waco ISD's health services and special education departments coordinate closely to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students with disabilities. Appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities are determined on a case-by-case basis in consultation with each parents/guardians and relevant school staff.

Continuity of Services

Since campuses were closed for in-person instruction in March 2020, Waco ISD has purchased more than 10,000 student devices (Chromebooks, iPads or laptops) and received more than 7,000 mobile hotspots. The district has also expanded wireless access outside of selected campuses and, through a partnership with the Waco Housing Authority, at three public housing developments. As a result, in the unlikely event that some or all of the district's schools were required to close again, every student would have a device to take home with them, and every family without home internet access would be able to check out a mobile hotspot allowing them to stay connected to instruction and instructional materials.

Similarly, the extended closure early in the pandemic demonstrated the ability of the child nutrition services department to adapt their summer feeding model to provide curbside, grab-and-go meals for students while campuses are closed. The department also has relationships with community organizations that are willing to serve as food distribution sites if campuses are unavailable and/or those community sites are more conveniently located for families. Should campuses have to close again, the child nutrition services department can quickly ensure that families continue to receive healthy and delicious meals for their children.

While Waco ISD is prepared to maintain continuity of instruction and other services in the unlikely event of another closure, the district is also expanding the support available for both students and staff. Over the next three years, Waco ISD will use \$49.9 million in federal funding from the American Recovery Plan Act to provide academic support, social-emotional support, and support for a culture of literacy. A more detailed description of those plans is available at <https://www.wacoisd.org/domain/7579>.

Periodic Review

Waco ISD will continue to closely monitor the local public health situation and guidance from the state and public health experts. The district will also continue to solicit public input. At least once every six months through September 2023, this plan will be revised to reflect changes in the public health situation, updated public health guidance, and additional public input. If changes in state requirements or guidance from the public health district warrant it, it may be updated more frequently.

Public Input

In preparation for the 2020-2021 school year, Waco ISD convened educator working groups, distributed a survey to all teachers, held a telephone town hall for families, and surveyed a statistically representative sample of parents/guardians to provide input on health and safety measures and instructional options. The district received ongoing public input on the resulting plan throughout the school year, and the plan was regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in public health guidance and state requirements as well as that feedback.

In preparation for the 2021-2022 school year, the plan was retitled and revised to be consistent with the language and requirements of the American Recovery Plan Act. At that time, the district incorporated additional public input solicited through surveys, meetings with employees, and a public hearing.

Before revising and updating the plan in January 2022, Waco ISD sought additional public input. District staff reviewed the plan with and sought input from the Quality District Advisory Committee at their meeting on Nov. 15, 2021. The committee includes parents, teachers, principals, other district personnel and community members. District staff also met with members of the Waco High and University High student councils on Jan. 12, 2022. Finally, the proposed updates to the plan were discussed during the school board meeting on Jan. 27, 2022, and the public was invited to comment on the plan during that meeting. Waco ISD engaged in a similar process to gather feedback before updating the plan in July 2022 and in January 2023, which also included collecting survey responses from students, families and educators.

Both current and previous versions of the plan can be found online at wacoisd.org/backtoschool2021. Those documents are available on the district's website in English and Spanish, and individuals who wish to access the current plan in an alternative format can call 254-755-9473 for assistance.

Students, their families, employees and other members of the public are also invited to provide input on the current version of this plan. That feedback will be considered the next time that the plan is reviewed and revised. Please submit comments on the plan via email to kourtnei.parnell@wacoisd.org or by calling 254-799-0983.