

The Road Forward: Readington Ready

A Planning Document for Operating the 2021-2022 School Year



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Introduction

Dear Members of the Readington Community,

As we enter another school year, we are reminded that the COVID-19 pandemic maintains some influence over the operation of schools. Our district seeks to return our children to full-day in-person instruction as mandated by the Governor's Office and Department of Education. However, we maintain certain protocols to ensure the safety of our staff, students, and families.

Much of this plan has been developed using two documents provided by the New Jersey Department of Education. The first is the Safe Return Plan which was shared at our June 8 Board of Education meeting and is currently posted on our website. Much of what is found in this document is also referenced in that document. Second, our protocols are informed by *The Road Forward: Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021-2022 School Year*. This document was developed collaboratively between the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Health.

Our district remains optimistic that this year will bring with it a return to normalcy. We are confident in our ability to provide full-time in-person instruction for the duration of the school year. To that end, we have outlined protocols that will enable us to comply with public health procedures during school operations.

We look forward to a productive school year!

Sincerely,

Jonathan Hart, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Mask Wearing Protocols

The Safe Return Plan informs our school community of the following: “The Readington Township School District is hoping the improved nature of the COVID-19 pandemic will allow us to lift the mask requirement for the fall. However, if needed, our district will adhere to local and state Department of Health guidelines as it pertains to the universal and correct wearing of masks. The wearing of masks may be mandated in certain circumstances over the course of the 2021-2022 school year but may also be optional in other circumstances. If no mask mandates exist in the 2021-2022 school year, the Readington Township School District will allow for the optional wearing of masks for students and employees. The district will await specific guidance from the Department of Health or Department of Education in order to develop policies or procedures related to the wearing of masks.”

As of August 9, 2021, according to Executive Order 251, masks will be broadly required in school buildings for the coming school year. Exceptions will remain unchanged from the 2020-2021 school year and include:

- When doing so would inhibit the individual’s health, such as when the individual is exposed to extreme heat indoors;
- When the individual has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance;
- When a student’s documented medical condition or disability, as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Educational Plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, precludes use of a face covering;
- When the individual is under two (2) years of age;
- When an individual is engaged in an activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating and drinking or playing an instrument that would be obstructed by the face covering;
- When the individual is engaged in high-intensity aerobic or anaerobic activity;
- When a student is participating in high-intensity physical activities during a physical education class in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

Transportation: Per order of the CDC, passengers and drivers must wear masks on school buses, included on buses operated by public or private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in the Order. All students and staff will wear masks on school buses unless there is an exemption, such as extreme heat.

There may come a time during the 2021-2022 school year when mask wearing becomes optional. This may occur if the Department of Health notices lower community transmission, if the Governor revokes the Executive Order, and/or if the school district notices low positive cases within the schools. There is some uncertainty regarding these scenarios, but all stakeholders will be informed if masks become optional.

Distancing/Cohorting Protocols and Plexiglass Barriers

Six feet of distance will not be possible during the 2021-2022 school year with the return of all students to in-person instruction. Considering Hunterdon County's current low community transmission, we will not opt for cohorting or screening of students.

Our district will take the following precautions:

- We will aim for 3-feet of distance between student desks in the classroom.
- Group seating arrangements will be avoided or reduced to the extent possible. Student desks will largely face forward.
- Physical distancing of 3-feet will be attempted in common areas with large capacities such as cafeterias (see Meal Service for more details).

Plexiglass barriers will not be placed on all student desks. Barriers will be provided for any student who wishes to have one on his/her desk. Barriers will not be placed on staff member desks but may be requested as an accommodation. Finally, barriers will remain in high-traffic areas such as the main office and nurse's office. These barriers may be removed during the school year and/or as the COVID-19 situation improves.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

According to the CDC, covering coughs and sneezes and keeping hands clean can help prevent the spread of serious respiratory illness.

Students will be taught and reminded to:

- Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing;
- Throw used tissues in the trash;
- If a tissue is not available, cough/sneeze into one's elbow, not hands.

Handwashing shall be encouraged and may happen at various times during the school day. These include: upon arrival at school, before and after meals, after going to the bathroom, before leaving for the day, after blowing one's nose or coughing, when hands are soiled. Students will be permitted to wash hands and use hand sanitizer at their own discretion but also at the instruction of staff members. Teachers will do their best to incorporate handwashing protocols into the school schedule.

Hand sanitizer will be made available for student and staff use in each classroom and on the bus in a similar fashion to the 2020-2021 school year.

Meal Service and Meal Delivery in the Case of a School Closure

Upon opening the school year, our district will provide school meals for students and staff with cold options only. Grab-n-Go style meals will be prepared in advance for individuals. After the first month of school, our plan is to open cafeteria meal service to a larger variety of options.

Our district is considering various options to maintain some form of physical distancing in cafeterias. These options include:

- Staggering lunch/recess or academic support times to reduce the number of students in the cafeteria at once;
- Using outdoor space as seating for lunch;
- Using classrooms as an option for eating lunch.

In an effort to ensure everyone's health, students are discouraged from sharing meals or snacks. This practice also prevents any unknown food contamination that may cause an allergic reaction.

In the event of a full school closure for an extended period of time, the district will use our school bus drivers to deliver pre-packaged meals for eligible students who opt into the meal delivery program. The program will operate similarly to meal delivery in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. This will involve coordination with our school meal service provider, Maschio's.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Our district seeks to maintain a clean and healthy learning/working setting. To that end, we will maintain many of our cleaning protocols this year.

Airflow and HVAC Settings:

Like last year, the district recognizes the need to create additional passive air circulation and introduction of increased outdoor air into the building to promote safety. The district shall remove all classroom fans and hand blow dryers in bathrooms as non-passive in nature. HVAC units shall be adjusted to increase outside airflow into the building, and windows shall be opened when feasible. Vent angles shall be adjusted as necessary to prevent direct, active airflow across surfaces, as airflow is preferred to be indirect to prevent the direct spread of water droplets in the air between students and staff. Passive air circulation from adjacent rooms and hallways shall occur unless safety or privacy prohibits.

Accommodations can be made for classrooms that fit a certain criterion regarding airflow. Like the 2020-2021 school year, staff will be able to request a HEPA filter should their classroom or office space meet the criteria.

Facilities and Cleaning:

As we did not see much evidence that COVID-19 was transmitted through contact with shared surfaces, we will be prepared to employ enhanced cleaning protocols, as needed. The district will ensure the safety and health of all students and staff by implementing the following practices on an as needed basis throughout the year:

- Facilities staff will review and receive retraining on cleaning and enhanced sanitation practices and safety protocols.
- Maintenance staff may be assigned if needed to a specific school building.
- Conducting daily cleaning and sanitizing of classrooms, restrooms, cafeterias, kitchens, and hallways.
- Conducting periodic and/or necessitated deep cleaning using enhanced protocols.
- Implementing improved sanitation and personal hygiene practices for both students and staff.

- Supplying hand soap, disinfecting wipes, and hand sanitizing gel in classrooms, main entrances, and high use areas. In areas where hand washing may not be available, sanitizing gel will be available.
- Supplying masks, gloves, face shields, plexiglass barriers, and additional PPE as needed.
- Restrooms and high touch areas will be cleaned/sanitized on a rotational basis during the school day. Daily logs will be kept to certify that the areas are being checked and cleaned.
- Cafeteria tables/seats/chairs will be cleaned and sanitized between lunch periods.
- Playground equipment will be cleaned with electrostatic sprayers as part of the evening cleaning rotation.
- Certain safety protocols will remain in place in our Transportation Department. Students will have additional masks (if needed) available on the bus along with hand sanitizer. Students will be grouped and sit in assigned seats by family to the extent possible. Social distancing will not be available on school buses.

Limit the Use of Shared Supplies:

In areas where it is possible, we will limit the use of shared supplies. This includes the use of materials in classrooms. Books, crayons, markers, etc. will, to the greatest extent possible, be assigned to specific students for use. If this is not possible, we will encourage students to wash their hands after use of shared materials.

COVID Assurance/Screening

Parents/caregivers are strongly encouraged to monitor their children for signs of illness every day as they are the front line for assessing illness in their children. Students who are sick should not attend school. Our district will strictly enforce exclusion criteria for both students and staff (see below). In future communications, our district will educate parents about the importance of monitoring symptoms and keeping children home while ill. We will also provide a list of symptoms that families should check for before leaving for school. One COVID Assurance checklist will be sent in the first *Genesis* blast of the school year. This will ensure all parents have read the signs and symptoms of COVID before the school year starts.

Families should contact the absence line if their child will not attend school. This is our reporting system for student absences.

Transportation

Per Order of the CDC, passengers and drivers must wear masks on school buses, included on buses operated by public or private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in the Order. All students and staff will wear masks on school buses unless there is an exemption, such as extreme heat.

District school buses will maintain hand sanitizer and masks for student use. When boarding the school bus, students will have access to hand sanitizer and will be provided a mask if s/he does not have one. Windows will be open for air circulation.

COVID-19 Testing Procedures

In order to be in compliance with Executive Order 253, the Readington Township School District will be partnering with a vendor to provide testing services to staff members. Should the need arise, testing will also be available to students who select to test. The district has until October 18 to have final plans in place. Further communication will be available once operational and logistical protocols are developed.

Response to Symptomatic Students, Quarantine and Exclusion

Isolation rooms will be maintained for the 2021-2022 school year. In the event a child or staff member is symptomatic, s/he will be respectfully asked to report to the isolation room where the school nurse will follow protocol.

Parents should not send students to school when sick. For school settings, NJDOH recommends that students with the following symptoms be promptly isolated from others and excluded from school:

- At least two of the following symptoms: fever (measure or subjective), chills, rigors (shivers), myalgia (muscle aches), headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, congestion, or runny nose; OR
- At least one of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, new olfactory disorder, or new taste disorder.

For students with chronic illness, only new symptoms or symptoms worse than baseline should be used to fulfill symptom-based exclusion criteria.

Exclusion criteria

When to stay home in the case of illness:

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19
- If you have COVID-19 compatible symptoms (see above) and have not been tested

When to stay home in the case of close contact:

- If you were in close contact with a known case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- In-home close contact, also known as household contact, may result in a longer period of exclusion from school based on the DOH investigation.

Exclusion timelines may vary depending on the regional matrix. In general, the exclusion periods are as follows:

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19, exclusion is 10 days from the onset of symptoms or the positive test and individuals must be 24 hours fever-free before returning to school.
- If you have COVID-19 compatible symptoms but have not been tested, exclusion is 10 days from the onset of symptoms, and individuals must be 24 hours fever-free before returning to school.
- If you are a close contact of an individual who has been identified as COVID-19 positive, you are excluded from school for a period of 10-14 days, depending on the regional matrix. Specifically, *The*

Road Forward identifies a moderate or low (yellow or green) regional matrix exists, exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 10 days (or 7 days with a negative test collected at 5-7 days). A high (orange) matrix indicates exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 14 days.

- The timelines listed here may be extended for household contacts where the DOH has determined isolation may not be possible. Household contacts may be excluded from school for a period of up to 24 days.
- An alternate diagnosis (including a positive strep test or influenza swab) without a negative COVID-19 test is not acceptable for individuals who meet COVID-19 exclusion criteria to return to school earlier than the timeframes above.

Finally, according to *The Road Forward*, fully vaccinated individuals who have no COVID-like symptoms but come in close contact with a COVID-19 case do not need to be quarantined for any period of time. They should monitor symptoms, and if the individual becomes symptomatic s/he should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19.

Travel: The State of New Jersey no longer requires quarantine for domestic travel. The CDC recommends that individuals not travel internationally until they are fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated individuals are recommended to get tested 3-5 days after travel. The CDC recommends unvaccinated individuals arriving in the United States after international travel will be required to test negative and quarantine for 7 days. The district will follow these recommendations.

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is a strategy used to determine the source of an infection and how it is spreading. Finding people who are close contacts of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, and therefore at higher risk of becoming infected themselves, can help prevent further spread of the virus.

Per the CDC, close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period. Exception: In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting (updated 8/23/21).

The district staff will identify school-based close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case in school. The district will cooperate with the local health department during a close contact investigation.

Remote Learning Scenarios and Teacher Guidelines

The Road Forward reinforces the need for full-time in-person instruction: Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9, schools must be in session for 180 days to receive state aid. The statute requires that school facilities be provided for at least 180 days during the school year. Section (b) notes that where a district is required to close

the schools of the district for more than three consecutive school days due to a declared state of emergency, declared public health emergency, or a directive and/or recommendation by the appropriate health agency or officer to institute a public health-related closure, days of virtual or remote instruction commensurate with in-person instruction will count towards the district's 180-day requirement.

However, *The Road Forward* does allow for remote instruction in the case of quarantine: LEAs may be confronted with the incidence of COVID-19 positive cases amongst staff and/or students. If an LEA is required to exclude a student, group of students, a class, or multiple classes as a result of the scenarios listed above, while the school itself remains open for in-person instruction, the LEA should be prepared to offer virtual or remote instruction to those students in a manner commensurate with in-person instruction to the extent possible. In circumstances when the school facilities remain open and in-person instruction continues in those classrooms that are not required to quarantine, those days in session will also count towards the district's 180-day requirement in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9.

Therefore, the following plans for two scenarios: 1) The event of a school-wide or district-wide closure and pivot to virtual learning due to the public health crisis and 2) The event any number of students are quarantined due to close contact or other exclusion.

General Teacher Expectations:

In order to follow the guidelines of the NJDOE Road Forward, the district will make the following expectations for teachers in the event of a school closure:

- Teachers will create a Google Meet or Zoom link for their class(es) and instruct students on how to access the link for virtual learning should the need arise. This will be accomplished within the first 10 days of the school year.
- Teachers will maintain activities, assignments, and other necessary materials in Google Classroom. These are designed to be accessible in the event of a school shut down or student quarantine.

Closure:

In the event of a school or district closure, teachers and students will be expected to pivot to virtual learning with short notice. How to access Google Classroom and the class meeting link must be reviewed prior to a school closure so all students are able to attend virtual school for the necessary days. In addition to reviewing these protocols, teachers will consider the following:

- Developing a schedule consistent with the regular classroom schedule that allows for lunch, recess, and regular breaks. Provide students with the schedule so s/he and parents know when to log in. The instructional schedule should be consistent with an early dismissal schedule of 4.5 hours with additional office hours beyond the 4.5 hours of instructional time.
- Ensure that students know how to access other online resources.
- Develop a listserve of parent email addresses so parents can be made aware of online learning protocols and the schedule.

Quarantine:

In the event a student or group of students are quarantined based on the scenarios listed above, the following protocols will be put in place:

- Individuals involved will be the building principal, school nurse, teacher(s), and assigned a remote tutor to each school building.
- Once it is determined a child must quarantine, the School Nurse will notify the classroom teacher, building principal, and designated remote tutor.
- The classroom teacher(s) will ensure Google Classroom is updated and have any necessary conversation with the remote tutor.
- The remote tutor will reach out to the family to coordinate at least 1-2 hours of daily remote tutoring with the student. The teacher may also meet the students remotely in small groups or individually depending on the number and grade level of the students on remote tutoring. The hours will be determined in coordination with the family, but final determination of the schedule will be the tutor's.
- The tutor will provide the link to his/her virtual sessions. These tutoring sessions will be posted on the school website.
- **Note:** Classroom teachers should know that if 25% or more of his/her class is quarantined, the district administration may expect the teacher to begin synchronous online/in-person learning for the period of time students are quarantined. There are other instances where synchronous learning may be used as well. Final determination will come from the building principal.

Music and Chorus Classes

Our music classes, chorus classes, and instrumental lessons will maintain a minimum of 3 foot spacing to the extent possible. Indoor rehearsal/singing times will be a maximum of 30 minutes. There are no restrictions for outside practice. More details are below regarding the specifics of music classes:

K-5 Music class: Bring your own mask for music class like sneakers for gym unless masks are required for the entire school day.

6-8 Chorus: Masks will be required for singing.

Wind instruments: Masks and bell covers will be provided by the school for wind instrument rehearsals and instruction. Procedures will be followed for the appropriate elimination of brass fluid.

Physical Education Classes

PE classes will continue this school year. The following protocols will be used in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19:

- Locker rooms will be used for changing. Our district will monitor locker room use. Clothes will be stored in a bag or locker.
- PE classes will take place outside whenever possible. This may mean that classes are outdoors on cooler days as well.
- Students will not be required to wear a mask during PE class when engaged in physical activity. Students are encouraged to maintain social distance when not wearing a mask.
- All students will wash hands or use hand sanitizer after using PE equipment.
- If possible, shared equipment will be wiped down by staff members or students.

Science Class, Discovery Lab and I&D

There are several classes that require students to work collaboratively to conduct investigations. We know that collaborative, inquiry-based learning is a powerful learning experience. The guidelines for this type of instruction is as follows:

- Teachers should place groups together with materials for 15 minutes or less.
- The smaller the group, the better. Groups should be limited to 4 students. If possible, break the class into sections where one half of the class is doing the investigation and the other half independent work (then switch).
- Ensure that students wash hands or use hand sanitizer after touching shared materials.
- If possible, shared equipment will be wiped down by staff members or students.

Internet Access Outside of the District

Internet access while home is a critical component of any virtual learning environment. In the 2020-2021 school year the Readington Township Technology Department developed Standard Operating Protocols for Student Internet Access Assistance. This document included protocols for the following and will be used in the 2021-2022 school year:

- Distributing devices to all students, our district is a 1-to-1 district providing iPads to all students in Kindergarten and Chromebooks for all students grades 1-8;
- Ensuring that all students and parents are aware of district policies regarding devices;
- Providing assistance through cable or satellite providers, the local library, or a mobile phone hotspot;
- Loaning a district-owned mobile WiFi hotspot provider should the connectivity issue continue.

Further, our district Business Office considers the free/reduced lunch population and the need for accessibility as well. This review is part of our protocol to ensure families in need have internet access.

COVID Response to the Regional Matrix

Below identifies our potential response as the regional matrix may change. This is also subject to guidance from the NJDOH and NJDOE.

	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
Lunch/Meals	Staggered or Distance Lunch	Staggered or Distance Lunch	Staggered or Distance Lunch and incorporate other usable lunch space	Early Dismissal (no lunch)
Visitors	Visitors welcome	Visitors welcome	Only essential visitors/meetings	No visitors
Mask Wearing*	Voluntary masks, encouraged for unvaccinated	Voluntary masks, encouraged for unvaccinated	Masks required	Masks required
Student Cohorts	All students attend	All students attend	All students attend	Divide into 2 cohorts
Sanitizing	Enhanced sanitizing	Enhanced sanitizing	Enhanced sanitizing	Enhanced sanitizing with added wiping of surfaces between use
Assurance Form	September assurance (once)	September assurance (once)	September assurance (once)	Daily assurance
Facility Use	All facilities available with cleaning protocols	All facilities available with cleaning protocols	All facilities available with cleaning protocols	Facility use restricted
Barriers	In high-traffic areas and as requested	In high-traffic areas and as requested	Required in small group instruction and offices	Required in all rooms
Transportation	Assigned seating, masks required, and sanitizer available	Assigned seating, masks required, and sanitizer available	Assigned seating, masks required, and sanitizer available	Assigned seating, masks required, and sanitizer available
Sports/Clubs	Sports and clubs offered, locker rooms used	Sports and clubs offered, locker rooms used	Sports and clubs offered, no locker rooms used	Limited sports, no clubs, no locker rooms
Instructional Delivery for Quarantined Students	Home Instruction for chronically ill students Tutoring hours for quarantined students	Monitor quarantine number and provide: Tutoring hours or Synchronous Instruction	Synchronous Instruction	Synchronous Instruction
Seating	Assigned seating in classroom and cafeteria	Assigned seating in classroom and cafeteria	Assigned seating in classroom and cafeteria	Assigned seating in classroom and cafeteria

*Tentative pending any Executive Orders or guidance from the NJDOH specifically relating to transmission rate.