

Excitement is building as we are only days away from welcoming our students back into our classrooms. Over the past several weeks we have had the opportunity to see many current students participate in our summer enrichment programs and welcomed our incoming Kindergarten students with our traditional bus run and classroom visit.

While the excitement we were feeling in June that COVID would soon be a thing of the past has been replaced by the recent surge in new cases driven by the Delta variant, we are accepting that COVID will, unfortunately, have an impact for at least the beginning of the school year.

To that effect, I wanted to provide you with some of our reopening plans for the upcoming school year. I would also like to thank my colleagues and the members of the district's Re-entry Task Force for their input and feedback in the creation of plans that will allow us to safely reopen our buildings and welcome our students back.

Please understand that our reopening guidance is based on the information we have gathered as of today; in the event New York State issues new guidance it will supersede the current plans we are sharing today.

Vaccinations:

- Vaccinations remain the most effective way to avoid contracting COVID and protect against severe illness if infected
- Vaccination status will prevent quarantine, unless symptomatic
- Anyone twelve years of age or older is eligible to receive the vaccination, and we do not yet have a timeline for when it will be available to all students
- The Putnam Valley School District will partner with anyone who is eligible and seeking to be vaccinated
- NYS announced that booster shots will soon be available
- Governor Hochul has announced plans to pursue mandatory vaccinations for all school district staff

Face Coverings:

- As per New York State Department of Health, face coverings will be mandatory for everyone while in school (vaccinated and unvaccinated)
- Overwhelming guidance from the CDC and AAP along with information shared by the New York State Department of Education, Putnam County Health Department and our School Physician all agree that mask usage should be universal in schools
- Considerations include: Health and Safety, Prevention/Reduction of Contact Tracing, Liability, and Prioritization of In-Person Learning
- Monitor community transmission rates in hopes that universal masking will no longer be necessary and vaccination rates increase and community transmission rates decrease
- Emphasis: Masks primarily control exhalation (protecting others), before inhalation

(protecting self)

- Face coverings are recommended, but not required outdoors

Physical Distancing

- Recommendation is 3 feet of social distance between students while indoors and wearing a mask (unless distance does not allow for full return to in-person instruction, as per NYSED).
- Outdoor mask use is recommended but not required at this time
- 6 feet of distance is recommended between students and unvaccinated adults
- Cohorting is recommended when possible to limit potential exposure
- Social distancing should be maximized when students are unmasked (lunch, band, etc).

Testing

- Weekly staff testing program planned for upcoming school year
- New York State announced that schools will now be required to weekly test unvaccinated staff
- Student testing remains optional, parent permission must be obtained
- Extracurricular sports and activities may result in additional testing requirements
- Screening testing is recommended for students in areas with substantial or high community transmission.
- District is looking to partner with outside agencies to help facilitate testing
- Our School Nurses have been instrumental in supporting this work

Daily Screenings:

- Daily Screeners and Temperature Checks are no longer recommended
- Concerted efforts must continue to advise the entire school community to keep symptomatic or exposed individuals home
- Efforts will be made to promote making the right choice instead of monitoring daily email compliance

Personal Hygiene:

- Regular hand washing
- Respiratory hygiene
- Hand sanitizer

Contact Tracing/Quarantine Orders

- Awaiting additional information from NYS regarding contact tracing, we will follow the guidance below.
 - **Students: 3 feet (if masks are properly worn by all)**, otherwise as determined by case investigation
 - Staff: 6 foot radius around infected person
 - Time exposure: 10 minutes over 24 hours (cumulative, may be changed to 15 min by NYS)

- Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine unless symptomatic
 - Recommends testing between days 3-5
- Unvaccinated individuals must quarantine
- Student quarantines will be rare in typical classroom settings (3ft and a mask, avoids quarantine)

Facilities/Transportation

- Our HVAC system remains highly efficient and utilizes Merv-13 filters
- Maximization of fresh air intake (HVAC & Windows)
- Transportation: No social distancing, windows open, masks required
- Cleaning/Disinfection: Daily cleaning of all spaces continue
- De-emphasis on surface transmission
- Wipe down of high touch surfaces will continue
- Desk cleaner available if requested

Remote Instruction

- All-remote instruction will not be available this year, all students are encouraged to attend in-person; homeschooling remains the other option
- Instruction of quarantined students remains our responsibility
 - How do we best educate quarantined students over short periods of time?
 - Buildings are working on plans to best support teachers and students
- Shift thinking from remote learning to quarantined instruction
 - Different expectations, No pre-planning, Small number of students, Short periods of time, Teacher flexibility (asynchronous vs synchronous), Additional staff support, Etc
- Students who are otherwise home sick or on vacation would not qualify for remote instruction; teacher-determined resources will be provided as in years past

Athletics & Music Education

- Close contact sports and indoor sports are particularly risky.
- Similar risks may exist for music education and performances, such as band, choir, and theater.
- Masks are required indoors for all student-athletes, regardless of vaccination status
- Students should refrain from these activities when they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and should be tested
- Strongly encourage COVID-19 screening testing for student athletes, students participating in music education, or other activities with elevated risk
- We plan to offer a full athletic program, all student athletes, especially those who participate in “high-risk” sports are encouraged to be vaccinated

Despite the health and safety precautions that will be in place when school reopens next week, we remain committed to providing a safe, supportive, and rigorous learning environment for all students.

Thank you for your continued partnership to keep our students safely in school and our buildings open. Adherence to the guidelines above, specifically the requirement to keep sick children at home, will help allow our students to benefit from in-person instruction.

Thank you,
Dr. Jeremy Luft
Superintendent of Schools