

HOMER
CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

2021-2022
School Reopening Plan

Updated and Board approved on March 8, 2022

Updated items are denoted in red font.

Dear Homer School Community:

I am happy to share with you our reopening plan for the 2021-2022 school year and am excited that our schools will be welcoming all students for five days a week of in person instruction.

Throughout the pandemic Homer has pulled together to safely meet the needs of our students and school community. We appreciate the support, trust, and cooperation that you have shown us during this time.

The safety precautions outlined in this reopening plan were created by reviewing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, guidance from the New York State Education Department along with guidance from state and local health officials.

We are grateful for the support of our board of education, administrators, school staff, public health officials, and school community during this challenging time and will continue to update you on the latest guidance as the pandemic evolves.

Please be sure to review this updated reopening plan carefully. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Take care and thank you for entrusting your child's education to us.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Turck

Superintendent of Schools
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COVID 19 Prevention Strategies Most Important for Safe In-Person Learning in K-12 Schools

1. Promoting Vaccination

According to the Centers for Disease Control, "vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic." The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages all eligible individuals to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

While Homer Central Schools is not currently requiring vaccination for school staff, we encourage all staff members and eligible students to discuss the COVID-19 vaccines with their primary care provider and consider getting vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available for eligible individuals ages **5** and up. Vaccines can be obtained at NYS vaccination locations, county locations, or retail pharmacies.

To learn more about vaccination, visit vaccines.gov.

2. Consistent and Correct Mask Use

Effective March 2, 2022, widespread mask wearing in schools is no longer mandatory. The only circumstance under which a person must wear a mask is if she has tested positive for Covid-19 and attends school on days 6-10 of their quarantine period.

3. Physical Distancing

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that schools should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning. The CDC and the New York State Education Department recommends physical distancing of three feet between individuals, but the CDC also denotes several studies from the 2020-2021 school year that show low COVID-19 transmission levels in schools when other mitigation measures are in place – click here.

Homer Central School District will expect students to maintain a minimum distance of at least three feet during classroom activities. Students will be appropriately spaced in cafeterias and on school vehicles.

The district will increase other mitigation measures such as improving fresh air flow by opening windows. Where there is not the ability to open windows, the district will place air purification units to improve air quality.

4. **School Based Testing**

Homer CSD will partner with Cortland County and OCM BOCES to provide free, voluntary symptomatic COVID testing for staff and students. This will allow any student or staff member that experiences Covid-19 symptoms, during the school day, to be tested prior to going home. This will shorten the time needed to contact a physician, pay for and get a Covid-19 test, and to wait for the results. We are hopeful that this will help us to safely return students and staff to school more quickly than in the past.

5. **Ventilation**

The Centers for Disease Control notes that improving ventilation is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy that can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. The CDC encourages improving ventilation by bringing fresh outdoor air into the building by opening windows, making changes to the HVAC or filtration systems.

Custodial and maintenance staff will perform monthly inspections of HVAC systems and change air filters on a quarterly basis with the highest grade MERV filter that does not reduce air flow to the unit. Most classroom unit ventilators can accommodate a MERV 8 or 9A HEPA filter.

6. **Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

Classroom teachers will emphasize the importance of proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette. The CDC notes that schools should monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate handwashing supplies. Custodians will monitor bathroom and classroom sinks to make sure that faucets are functioning correctly and are regularly cleaned and sanitized. Students will be reminded to wash their hands regularly especially before or after meal periods or after using the restroom. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer stations are available at various locations throughout the school and in classrooms.

7. **Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested**

In accordance with CDC guidance, students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness (influenza or COVID-19), should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for evaluation care and testing. Individuals who are absent from school will need to provide either a medical note or proof of a negative COVID test.

Students or staff members who develop symptoms during the school day will be sent home immediately. Parents of students will be contacted immediately to come and pick up their child.

Homer CSD will offer voluntary, symptomatic COVID testing in each of our buildings, with parental consent, prior to being sent home. Additional information on the process for testing of symptomatic students has been shared with families.

The district will send out reminders on a routine basis on the importance of staying home when sick and on the symptoms of COVID 19 which include:

- 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

The district will not be asking students and staff to fill out a daily health questionnaire and the district will not be taking student temperatures when students arrive at school. The CDC noted the limited effectiveness in symptom screening and "does not currently recommended routine (such as daily) school-based COVID-19 symptom screening of all students." It should be noted that students should not attend school when they are sick.

8. Cleaning and Disinfection

According to the Centers for Disease Control, daily cleaning and disinfection is usually sufficient to remove viral particles and germs from surfaces. The district will follow standard practices and procedures for school cleaning, which include a cleaning of classrooms and disinfecting high contact surfaces each evening after school hours. Here is a link to our standard cleaning and disinfection practices - click here.

Additional Considerations

Transportation

For students riding school vehicles, we will strive to have two students per seat and attempt to seat students by household. School vehicles will be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each school day. When weather conditions allow, drivers will attempt to increase air flow on school vehicles by opening windows and roof hatches.

Social/Emotional/Mental Health Needs
Homer CSD will continue to keep in touch with students, caregivers and parents regarding social, emotional, and mental health needs. The district will be implementing a Social-Emotional Screener to identify both group and individual needs and will communicate with families as plans for its use are finalized. The emotional impact on students during the pandemic has been significant. The district is using federal grant funds to secure additional staff to help address the social, emotional, and mental health needs of our students.

Food Service and School Meals
Homer CSD students can receive meals at no cost throughout the school year based on recent news from the United States Department of Agriculture. We do encourage families to complete the meal application on our website to assist the district in qualifying for various grants. Having accurate information regarding the economic need in our community opens the door for additional funding opportunities for programs for our students.

According to the CDC, "students should not be excluded from in person learning to keep a minimum distance, including meal times." Students will be appropriately spaced in cafeterias. With all students returning to in person learning, it may be necessary to use additional spaces to allow for this spacing. When possible, based on weather conditions and available staff for supervision, schools will allow students to eat outside.

School cafeterias and kitchens will be cleaned and disinfected daily. Schools will promote hand washing before and after eating, after handling garbage, or after using the restroom.

The district has air purification units for school cafeterias to improve ventilation and indoor air quality.

Student Attendance
School principals and nurses will continue to monitor student attendance. Schools will encourage regular on-time attendance and identify strategies and supports to assist students who are struggling with school attendance.

Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs
Homer CSD is committed to the safety of all students and staff. The district will provide accommodations, modifications, and assistance when implementing COVID-19 safety protocols. This may mean that approaches, strategies, and safety precautions may need to be adjusted for individual students or staff members based on their specific needs.

Given the focus on returning students to the classroom, Homer staff will not be live streaming lessons. While this service of live streaming lessons was available during the previous school

year, it was noted that some students excelled while learning from home but most home learning students were not successful. Home learning will be strictly limited to students who qualify with a medical condition.

Visitors
Homer CSD will continue to review and reevaluate visitor access during the pandemic. Last school year, we were successful in welcoming parents and spectators back for outdoor athletic events and extracurricular activities, such as concerts. As scheduled events approach, we will communicate important safety information to invited parents/caregivers and spectators.

For all school visitors, please be sure to stay home when you are sick and seek medical care, regardless of vaccination status.

Emergency Closures
The district will announce on Parent Square, major television stations and local media when schools are closed due to inclement weather, loss of utilities or other unforeseen circumstances. The district will continue to observe traditional “snow days” so long as the district does not exhaust the six emergency closing days built into the school calendar. This means that all schools will be closed and no transportation services will be provided during emergency closing days.

In the event that schools are closed by local, state or officials due to a spread of disease or lack of available staffing resources, schools may have to shift to home learning. Classroom teachers should be prepared to switch to home learning quickly. In the event that schools are closed for in person learning, students will be expected to login from home and follow their normal school schedule via video conferencing tools and online learning platforms provided by the district.

Home Learning
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Recess and Physical Education

Locker rooms will not be used for Physical Education class and students will not change for P.E. Parents and caregivers should be sure to dress students appropriately, even during the winter months, for outdoor activities during physical education classes and recess.

Sports and Other Extracurricular Activities
Homer CSD will work with Section III and our league to develop protocols for safe participation in athletics programs for students. At this point, we are planning for all team sports to be played as scheduled.

For indoor sports and activities, the district continues to monitor the latest health and safety guidance to determine if/how many visitors will be allowed to attend. Our goal is to allow visitors at indoor activities and will safely follow any guidance on this issue.

Supports for School Staff Members
Homer CSD recognizes the challenges that our school employees face in dealing with the stress of day to day school activities coupled with the additional safety precautions during the pandemic. We are incredibly grateful and proud of the work of our dedicated staff members. Employees who are dealing with personal or family issues can access our Employee Assistance Program by calling 315-471-1361 or 1-800-327-8764, emailing eap@ocmboces.org or visiting the program website - https://www.ocmboces.org/eap

Emergency Operations Plans
Homer CSD revised the District Emergency Response plan to include an appendix related to Pandemic Preparedness. A copy of the final emergency response plan is available on the district website.

Vaccination Verification
Homer CSD will work with state and local vaccine providers to encourage vaccination efforts with school employees and students. The district will follow all confidentiality requirements under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).