

Summary of Proposed Key Changes to the Holland Patent Central School District's COVID Reopening Plan

2021-2022 School Year

Premise: We believe that students greatly benefit from in-person instruction as opposed to virtual or remote models of instruction. We provide a safe and supportive learning environment that tends not only to meeting the academic needs of all students but also to meeting the social and emotional needs of all students. We also help to provide critical services and supports to children and their families. We believe that this is best done when we have the ability to meet with our students in a face to face setting each day. As such, our reopening plan was built with the goal of providing in-person instruction each day, for every student, with as few interruptions, distractions and quarantines as possible, in the safest environment,

In preparation for the reopening of school in September 2021, we have reviewed many articles, letters, documents and studies, consulted with our local health department, sought advice and suggestions from our attorneys, local pediatricians, and insurance companies and have met and collaborated with other local school districts in an effort to make the most well informed decisions as we prepared a reopening plan for the 2021-2022 school year.

Many of our recommendations for this plan have come from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#), [Centers for Disease Control definition of "close contact" in the appendices updated August 5, 2021](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools of July 18, 2021](#), [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People of July 28, 2021](#), [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Delta Variant: What we Know about the Science of August 6, 2021](#), and [The NYSED Health and Safety Guide for the 2021-2022 School Year of August 2021](#). Also, we weighed our decisions heavily on the recommendations from pediatricians in the Utica-Rome area and the School Reopening Guidelines 2021-22 school year for Oneida County.

It is with the premise that students' basic needs must first be met in order to learn (food, shelter, safety, health, etc.) and that the backbone of any school is a professional, dedicated,

hard-working and healthy staff that we must base these recommendations if our goal remains to provide in-person instruction for every student, every day. It is also important as we plan to develop procedures that will allow for the fewest interruptions to instruction once school reopens on September 7, 2021. With this in mind, and with the threat of the increasing positivity rate of COVID-19 in Oneida County, 83 new cases from 8/27 to 8/29, we must attempt to limit the transmission of COVID-19 on campus, to minimize the numbers of quarantines that will be mandated by the Oneida County Health Department, to keep our students safe and healthy so they can remain in class and keep our staff healthy so they can continue to serve the students of our community.

With these things in mind, the following updates to our reopening plan are being recommended to the Board of Education for its approval at the meeting on September 2, 2021:

As of September 2, 2021 the following changes will be integrated into the HPCSD reopening plan:

- COVID vaccines will be widely promoted for all those age 12 and over
- HPCSD will serve as a vaccine site whenever possible, and as quickly as possible.
- A universal indoor masking policy will be mandated for all staff, students and visitors, regardless of vaccination status
- We will ask all students and staff to voluntarily share their vaccine status as this will affect quarantine policies and procedures.
- In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, if a student were to test positive, the close contacts of that student would not be expected to quarantine if both students (the infected and the exposed) were wearing masks consistently and properly the entire time as long as students remain symptom free
- Fully vaccinated individuals should be tested 3-5 days after an exposure to an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID diagnosis and should wear masks in all indoor settings for 14 days or until a negative test result. They should isolate if they test positive. Most fully vaccinated individuals with no COVID symptoms do not need to quarantine following an exposure if they follow all testing and masking mandates explained above.
- Unvaccinated adults who are considered to be close contacts of an individual with a suspected or confirmed COVID diagnosis may be expected to quarantine for 10-days, as per review of the case by the Oneida County Health Department
- Physical distancing between students and staff will be maintained at 3 feet whenever possible in all classrooms
- Physical distancing will be maintained at 6 feet whenever possible for Individuals who are immunocompromised in all classrooms
- Mask breaks will be implemented in classrooms in a safely designed format to allow for 6 feet separations periodically throughout the day

- Physical distancing will be maintained at 3-6 feet in the cafeterias, whenever possible
- Mass transit physical distancing guidelines will be followed and students will be allowed to sit two per seat on the bus and all riders and drivers will be required to wear masks at all times
- Increased ventilation will be maintained in all classrooms and on all
- Increased cleaning and disinfecting will take place, at least once per day, and if staffing allows, twice per day
- COVID testing will become common, and strongly suggested, if testing kits are available
- Individuals with flu like symptoms will be encouraged to stay home and will be sent home if entering school with these symptoms and negative COVID tests results may be required to reenter, if less than 10 days from the onset of symptoms
- Proper handwashing, disinfecting, respiratory etiquette, regular testing and quarantining and isolating when necessary will be enforced
- We will attempt to collect vaccination data and in combination with this information and the transmission rates in the county, we will continuously review and revise this plan
- Unvaccinated staff will be required to test weekly.
- High risk athletes will be required to continue to wear masks with uniforms and may be asked to submit to rapid testing if available.
- Clear masks will be available for students with special needs for visibility of facial expression and word formation.
- possible speech classes will be housed in spaces 6 feet apart to allow for no masking.

We will continue to review all CDC and the Oneida County Department of health recommendations as well as the local and state COVID-19 transmission levels as we review each of these recommendations as well as all activities that are considered to be high risk, such as interscholastic athletics, indoor band, field trips, offsite internships, etc. As of this update, it is our hope to continue with each of these activities, with all the proper mitigation strategies in place and being consistently and regularly enforced, however, certain restrictions may be applied if it's deemed to be necessary.

As long as in-person instruction for every student, every day, is an option and we are able to do it safely we will no longer be offering unrestricted access to virtual instruction. If students have a documented medical need and are unable to attend in-person instruction they will be asked to arrange a meeting with school officials. We will meet with the families involved and attempt to come to a consensus as to the best approach for alternatives to in-person instruction. The medical requests will be reviewed by our school physician. However, any virtual instruction options that may be employed, if any are to be employed, will be asynchronous. We have always worked with families in the past if students were unable to attend in-person instruction, and we will commit to doing so again. The options may be work packets provided by the teachers for a short term illness as per Board policy. If the illness is a long-term condition, enrollment in a BOCES run on-line program may be considered.

In summary, we recognize that these recommendations will not please everybody. We recognize the desire that parents have to make the decisions they feel are in the best interest of their children and their families, and we fully endorse and appreciate that. There are studies on both sides that detail the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines. People certainly need to make the decisions about whether or not to receive the vaccines based on the studies they believe, personal preferences and levels of comfort. We endorse receiving the vaccinations as a way to end this pandemic much more quickly, however we would never judge those who feel differently. Ultimately, this is a personal decision.

As far as the local decision about the universal wearing of masks in all indoor settings, we too recognize that many will not be in agreement with this policy and will feel as though this should be and remain a parent decision. We believe, however, that an individual parent decision in this instance, has the ability to affect many others who are not part of that family. We must look at this issue from a much more global perspective as we are charged with providing the safest environment for every student and staff member, and as such we feel as though the best way to do that is to follow what the majority of the scientific studies tell us about the effectiveness of wearing masks in indoor settings. The universal mask policy is now the law and must be followed in all indoor school settings.

Lastly, on the issue of the unrestricted access to virtual instruction, we feel strongly that in-person instruction is the most effective method of learning. Asking teachers to teach some students in front of them, while also being cognizant of those who are virtual in a synchronous environment, is an extremely difficult endeavor. We made it work last year and the staff did a tremendous job at making it look seamless, however, the planning and preparation that must go into that type of instructional model is tremendous and a lot to ask of our staff. They should plan for one mode of instruction, not multiple, as the planning is different for each. In addition, from the student's perspective, it's difficult to give the proper amount of attention to all students when some are learning in one mode well others are learning in a different mode. We believe there was learning loss at all levels.

Keep in mind this is a re-opening plan. We will continue to monitor the data. If all strategies work and numbers go down some of these requirements may be able to be relaxed.