

Whiteside Return to Full In-Person Instruction Plan

Introduction

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic became a reality for the families of Whiteside School District 115 when the State of Illinois mandated an emergency closure of all schools and limited the ability for in-person learning. District 115 returned the following fall (2020) with additional safety and health precautions in place to allow for student instruction. During the 2020-2021 school year, students were exposed to full remote, hybrid, and in-person learning. To safely reopen Whiteside School District students faced numerous barriers and limitations to teaching and learning.

The United States Congress quickly made emergency funds available to aid local school districts who faced significant academic, social, emotional, and mental health challenges due to interrupted learning caused by the COVID 19 Pandemic. These original funds were used to help Whiteside prevent, prepare, and respond to the ongoing pandemic during the past and upcoming school year. Most recently, funds became available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act that required school districts to develop a *Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services*.

Whiteside's Safe Return Plan has been developed in accordance with the ARP Act and the Illinois State Superintendent of Education declaration of July 9, 2021. It is aligned with guidance provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Whiteside School District's Safe Return Plan addresses an array of topics including adjustments needed in response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. The district worked with school district leaders, teacher's union representatives to devise a plan for the safe return of in-person learning for the upcoming school year. The district has surveyed parents on the use of mitigation efforts/techniques such as masks and will hold additional open comments on our safe return to full in-person learning for the public prior to the start of school.

2021-22 Full In-Person Instruction

The Illinois State Superintendent of Schools issued the following declaration instructing all schools to reopen fully for in-person learning for all students during the 2021-22 school year. It was also noted that remote instruction will only be provided/made available to students who are not vaccinated or vaccine ineligible **AND** who are under a directed quarantine by the local health department or the Illinois Public Department of Health.

Whiteside School District 115 has been in the process of planning to implement the State Superintendent's declaration in accordance with CDC guidance and local mitigation efforts for students and staff in the district found in the July 9, 2021 "Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K)-12 Schools". This guidance was officially adopted by the IDPH on July 9, 2021. District 115 will use a combination of the guidance along with local factors to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our schools.

****Whiteside School District reserves the right to make changes to any part of this plan during the course of the school year due to local COVID data, additional guidance provided by the CDC, IDPH, or our local county health department.****

Whiteside School District Student Daily Schedules

- Elementary Student Attendance Times: 8:30 - 3:00
 - Bathroom visits will be determined by administrative scheduling
 - Breakfast will be served to students in the classroom.
 - Lunch will be provided in the multipurpose/cafeteria in one location.
 - Special schedules will be determined by the administration - the district, with the use of COVID mitigations, will plan to have a more traditional special schedule
- Middle School Attendance Times: 8:15 - 2:45
 - Middle school students will have a traditional schedule associated with their day and switch between classes.
 - Breakfast will be provided in the classroom.
 - Lunch will be provided in the multipurpose/cafeteria in one location.
 - Special schedules will be determined by the administration - the district, with the use of COVID mitigations, will plan to have a more traditional special schedule.

Whiteside School District reserves the right to adjust the items listed above as needed based on COVID 19 issues found within the district.

- Scheduled In-person Instruction: All students must meet all registration requirements in order to access the 2021-22 school year.
 - Attendance taken daily
 - Truancy reported per ISBE guidelines
 - In-person traditional curriculum completed
 - Google classroom used for in-person instruction
 - Grades taken as normal

- Response to Intervention continued
 - District communication will be utilized via Skyward, School Messenger, and Facebook
 - Parents of students who need accommodations, modifications, or assistance related to COVID-19 safety protocols, disabilities, underlying medical conditions, or weakened immune system should contact the building principal or superintendent.
- Remote Learning Option: Implemented only for students under quarantine consistent with the local public health department or the Illinois public health department **AND** who have not received the COVID-19 vaccination or not eligible for the vaccination. Remote learning will resemble work associated with traditional absences from school and not include synchronous (streaming/live) learning.
 - Attendance - students are expected to complete the daily assigned work.
 - Grading - The district will utilize the current grading scale and assignments will be expected to be completed in a timely manner and turned into the students' classroom teacher.
 - Engagement - Teachers will communicate with students the assignments and materials while they are quarantined.
 - Students: access assigned work either via Google Classroom or written packet
 - Check for communication via their school issued email
 - Complete assignments online or complete and return packets

Whiteside School District has adopted the following mitigation efforts for the 2021-2022 school year to return to FULL In-Person Learning.

Facility and Instruction Information:

PPE and Mask Use

- Elementary School Mask Policy- all students, faculty, and staff are required to wear a mask while in attendance indoors at the elementary school. Students who do not have a mask will be issued a disposable mask upon entry into the school and be required to wear it while indoors within the school.

- Middle School Mask Policy - all students, faculty, and staff are required to wear a mask while in attendance indoors at the middle school. Students who do not have a mask will be issued a disposable mask upon entry into the school and be required to wear it while indoors within the school.
- All students and staff are required to wear a mask while riding the school bus or any transportation provided by the school district per the CDC.
- Mask use is recommended but not required outdoors during activities (e.g., participating in outdoor play, recess, physical education, sports, extra curriculars) that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission.
- **IMPORTANT: Mask use allows students to remain in school as long as possible and not quarantine due to close contacts with positive cases. Current guidance allows students who are wearing a proper fitting mask NOT to quarantine in the event of close contact in the classroom.**

Physical Distancing for Classroom/School

- Individual desks will be used along with arranging furniture to provide as much social distancing as possible
- Reinforce physical distancing of at least 3 feet when possible
- Provided assigned seating for students and encourage students to remain in these seats to the greatest extent possible
- Middle school: teachers will employ the same seating arrangements during the school day in each room visited by students to allow for a regular school exchange of classes schedule - exception will be during physical education or in the non-traditional classroom
- Continuation of marked paths of travel in classrooms and corridors
- Physical distancing measures are to be done in an equitable manner that does not perpetuate academic, racial, or other tracking (e.g., separating people into fully vaccinated and non-fully vaccinated cohorts).
- Assigned seats for all students
- Refrain from using shared supplies
- No flexible seating or grouped seating. Individual desks should be placed in rows, facing forward.
- Limit who is in classrooms to those required for instruction

Handwashing and Hygiene Etiquette

- School staff will monitor and reinforce frequent handwashing and hygiene practices
- Sanitize/wash hands upon entering and exiting the classroom
- Continuing to teach handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Assisting young children with handwashing as needed
- Reminding everyone in the facility to wash hands frequently
- Using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (for teachers, staff, and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer) when hand washing is not possible
- Continue to teach respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes)
- Regularly clean surfaces within the classroom before the transition if needed
- Communicate with parents of younger students to discourage their children from bringing any toys from home to school
- Encourage parents to label student personal items

Hallways/Lockers/Traffic Flow Information

- One way, directional flow in hallways as possible
- Split hallways with midline tape in the event one-way traffic is not viable
- Signage and floor markings promoting social distancing
- No hallway seating or areas to allow for congregation in the hallways
- No water fountains; bottles acceptable
- Bottles must be taken home and washed daily (no glass)
- No student congregating, supervision by staff to promote movement
- Limit students in the restroom at one time at applicable amounts
- Limit required movement of students between classes as needed

Physical Education, Gymnasiums, and Locker Rooms

- No contact games/activities
- Try to be outdoors or separated if indoors
- Very limited use of shared equipment. If shared equipment is used it will be cleaned between uses.
- Masks are worn as possible, depending on the activity
- Locker rooms not utilized
- Students will not be required to change for physical education

Library Services

- Library services will be limited at each school
- Students will select books electronically
- Book drops and classroom return procedures utilized
- Books disinfected and will not be allowed into circulation for 72 hours
- Services will be monitored and adjusted during the school year

Cafeteria/Food Service Information

- Sanitize/ wash hands upon entering and exiting in the cafeteria
- Utilize normal tables with students seated at each socially distanced per IDPH guidance.
- Utilize additional tables as needed
- Elementary School Students will be served at their tables with individually prepared meals.
- Middle School Students will use the kitchen service line, social distancing as they proceed through the line.
- Assigned seating for all students, grouped by classroom cohorts when possible.
- Use of disposable trays and utensils
- No joint use service (salad bars) and condiments provided individually
- Plexi-glass barriers added in serving locations and around the cashier
- During lunch masks will be placed on a lanyard or left on the desk while the student is at lunch when applicable.
- School staff will maximize physical distance as much as possible when moving through food service lines and while eating indoors. Aside from the cafeteria, additional spaces for mealtime seating will be utilized when available and feasible.
- Staff who are fully vaccinated do not need to distance while eating.

Social Emotional Support

- Social and emotional support will continue to be offered at both the elementary and middle school for students who may have experienced or are experiencing trauma related stress associated with COVID 19.
- If you have specific concerns about your child please contact the school counselors, social workers, and/or the administration.

Recess / Playground

- Sanitize/wash hands before and after recess
- Limit groups of students on outdoor equipment (**principals/teachers will develop a weekly rotation on playground equipment as needed**)
- Equipment will be cleaned on a routine basis **as well as between group use**
- **Cleaning supplies will be available for staff to use at recess as needed**
- **Hand Sprayers used to apply proper cleaning supplies**
- During recess masks will be placed on a lanyard or left on the desk while the student is attending recess when applicable.

Administrative Offices and Staff Work Area Information

- Sanitize/ wash hands upon entering and exiting office and staff areas
- Transactions conducted through the safety window, maintaining social distance
- Encourage payment and form submission to be done on-line
- Limit student personal items allowed in the offices (lunch drop off)
- No sick students in the offices; use isolation rooms or nurse's office
- Provide cleaning materials and hand washing supplies
- Clearly clean commonly used surfaces
- Students should be called to the office as directed or classrooms/nurses offices communicate the need when sending a student or a student requests to go to the office
- Plexiglass barriers installed in high traffic areas (student entry point and principal desks)

Facility and Transportation Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation

- School custodial staff will continue to clean surfaces daily.
- The district will employ traditional cleaning methods as well as use of electrostatic sprayers and the use of approved products to further reduce the risk of spreading infection.
- Disinfectants used will be approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 "List N" to disinfect spaces occupied by someone who tested positive for COVID-19.
- Maintenance staff will continue to regularly replace school ventilation system filters by using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- When possible, staff can open doors and windows, use child-safe fans, and have activities, classes, or lunches outdoors when circumstances allow.

Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

- Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, should stay home and contact their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Individuals in our school environments who show symptoms of COVID-19 are to immediately report to or be escorted to the school's health care professional's office to be either sent home or be quarantined in the school's supervised safe area while awaiting pickup/evaluation. Students and staff are required to wear masks while in the safe area. Parents should ensure that ill students are picked up from school within 30 minutes of being notified. Ill students will not be allowed to utilize the school bus to return home.
- Students and staff who are not fully vaccinated outside of school should quarantine after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19.
- Fully vaccinated people who were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do NOT have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or be tested.
- Student absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded as excused. To ensure continuity of services, school work missed during such an absence can be requested and made up in accordance with the school's policy (refer to student handbook); social, emotional, mental health, or other needs will be provided in accordance with a student's IEP or 504 Plan. Parents of students who have social, emotional, mental health, or other needs outside of an IEP or 504 Plan should contact their child's principal to discuss needs. Remote instruction will only be made available for non-vaccinated or vaccine ineligible students who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- Staff absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded in accordance with the district's sick leave policy and related professional negotiations agreements. To ensure continuity of services, staff members should contact their principals to discuss support for social, emotional, mental health, or other needs.
- To the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, school health care professionals will continue to collaborate with St. Clair County Health Department officials to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, including making notifications to staff and parents as soon as possible regarding those who were in close contact of someone in the school who tested positive for COVID-19.
- The district will publish a weekly COVID data tracker via the district's SKYWARD email notification system.
- Students and staff suspected of having COVID-19, whether they were tested or not, are to follow the CDC guidelines to determine when they can return to school.

- Following quarantine, students and staff returning from illness related to COVID-19 are to call to check in with the school's health care professional.

Promoting Vaccination

- District 115 is respectful of peoples' varying levels of vaccine confidence, those who want to get vaccinated against COVID-19 can visit the St. Clair County Health Department or several local vendors to find out the availability as well as where they can get vaccinated in our community.

Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs

- Parents of students who need accommodations, modifications, or assistance related to COVID-19 safety protocols, disabilities, underlying medical conditions, or weakened immune systems should contact their student's case manager to discuss the need(s).
- Staff members who need accommodations, modifications, or assistance related to COVID-19 safety protocols, disabilities, underlying medical conditions, weakened immune systems, or a sincerely held religious belief or practice (covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) should contact their school's principal to discuss the need(s). Staff members with weakened immune systems are advised to contact their healthcare professional about the need for continued personal protective measures after vaccination.

Visitors

- Nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations with people who are not fully vaccinated are discouraged from visiting schools.
- All visitors will be required to wear a mask and at times might be asked to meet in larger open spaces by the building level administration.
- Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations during the school hours, evening, and weekends
- If a visitor is allowed to enter the office, face masks must be worn and the visitor must submit to COVID safe workplace procedures
- Restrict where visitors can go in the building.
- Hand hygiene for visitors
- Maintain accurate records of visitors
- Consider outside drop off for items

Collaboration with Public Health Officials

- District officials will continue to collaborate and consult with St. Clair County Health Department officials throughout a pandemic on various logistics and decision-making including, but not limited to, school health and safety protocols, mitigation efforts, contact tracing, vaccine clinics, and emergency school closings.

Plan Review

- Through September 30, 2023, this plan will be reviewed no less frequently than every six months and revised as appropriate after seeking and considering public input. Revisions will address the most recently updated safety recommendations by the CDC, provided in an alternative format accessible to parents who are individuals with a disability as defined by the ADA, and made publicly available on the district's website.

Arrival / Dismissal

- Parents/guardians will agree to a daily self-certification for all students attending school during the current school year
- Any student testing above 100.4 will be isolated and sent home
- Isolation rooms established separately from the nurse's office
- Elementary and Middle School Entry will have grade designated doors
- Stagger bus routes as needed which will adjust arrival times
- Any student appearing to display symptoms must undergo COVID checks as requested by district staff

Other Items for Parents to Consider when returning to In-person

Instruction:

It is expected that students will follow district approved mitigations in accordance with CDC guidelines for the use of PPE (face coverings) and submit as needed to all screening procedures in order to attend school on an in-person basis. Facemasks will be handled similar to IDs and dress code in the district. Staff will promote, remind, and redirect students to follow guidelines. In the event a student refuses or is unable to comply with guidelines, a parent conference will be held with the principals.