

Whiteside Full In-Person Instruction Plan 2023-24

Introduction - Historical Perspective

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. Then the 2021-2022 school year, Whiteside returned to full in-person with several requirements for students to attend the school year. We also took the recommendations of the Illinois State Board of Education and did not offer a full remote option during this school year.

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.

Parents have the ability to comment at any time by emailing the Board of Education at whitesideschoolboard@wssd115.org. Comments will be reviewed by the administration and consider for recommendation to the Board of Education meeting the requirement for the community to provide input in the 2023-24 Return to Learning Plan.

2023-24 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 and this will continue this during the 2022-23 and as needed in future school years in the Whiteside School District. 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. This instruction will be similar to absentee work due to the current timelines associated with the CDCs exclusion policy associated with 5 days.

Whiteside School District 115 has been in the process of planning to implement our return to learn plan with the CDC guidance and local mitigation efforts for students and staff in the district. District 115 will use a combination of CDC, State, and local 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
 - 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.
 - 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 2023-24 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 2023-2024 school year to return to FULL In-Person Learning.

Facility and Instruction Information:

PPE and Mask Use

- Elementary, Middle School Mask Policy- The CDC recommends, but does not mandate, universal indoor masking in communities with high COVID-19 levels.
- All students and staff are recommended but not required to wear a mask while riding the school bus or any transportation provided by the school district.
- Mask use is recommended but not required during school activities (e.g., participating in outdoor play, recess, physical education, sports, extra curriculars)
- **In addition, district staff will not be responsible for the policing of mask wearing by students.**

Physical Distancing for Classroom/School

- 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
- 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
- Limit who is in classrooms to those required for instruction
- Elementary and Middle School entry will have grade designated doors

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 return to normal

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
- Assigned seating for all students, grouped by classroom cohorts when possible.
- Use of disposable trays and utensils
- Plexi-glass barriers added in serving locations and around the cashier
- 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
- Equipment will be cleaned on a routine basis
- **Cleaning supplies will be available for staff to use at recess as needed**
- 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
- 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)

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.
- Stagger bus routes as needed which will adjust arrival times

Vaccinations (new requirement)

- The School District encourages parents to explore vaccinations for COVID-19 vaccinations. There are several locations in and around Whiteside that offer child vaccinations and including adult vaccinations.
- The school district does not assume any liability for the above statement. This information is based on requirements associated with ESSER funding.

(New)

Exclusion from School Due to COVID-19 PCR or Symptoms:

Test Positive for COVID-19 – PCR or Antigen Test (Exclude From School)

Everyone, **regardless of vaccination status**, shall be excluded from school and may return under the following criteria:

- Stay home for a minimum of five (5) days and a maximum of 10 days after the first day of symptoms or the specimen collection date from positive viral test for asymptomatic persons
- Individuals may return to school after five (5) days if asymptomatic or if fever-free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours, diarrhea/vomiting have ceased for 24 hours, and other symptoms have improved.
- Individuals are strongly encouraged, but not mandated, to wear a mask around others, even when outdoors, for five more days after returning to school.

COVID-19 – like symptoms (Exclude From School)

Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, shall be excluded from school and may return to school under the following criteria:

- Receives a negative test (PCR, Antigen, or Home) result that confirms the symptoms are not attributable to COVID-19 and symptoms have improved or resolved and the criteria to return for that illness is met;

or

- For a minimum of five (5) days and a maximum of 10 days until fever free without fever reducing medication for 24 hours, diarrhea/vomiting have ceased for 24 hours, and other symptoms have improved;

or

- Submit a note from the individual's treating physician confirming the symptoms are not related to COVID-19 and stating the individual is cleared to return to school. Student/employee should only return once symptoms have improved/resolved per return-to-school criteria for diagnosed condition.
- Individuals are strongly encouraged, but not mandated, to wear a mask around others for five more days, even outdoors, after returning to school. Those testing positive should be excluded from school and follow guidance for persons testing positive.
- Employees may be required to take a COVID-19 test in order to determine his/her eligibility for COVID-19 paid administrative leave.

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.
- Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations during the school hours, evening, and weekends
- 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, 2024, 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.