

Addendum: January 3, 2022

Safe Return to School Plan Update: Mask Wearing Now Recommended Not Mandatory

In response to community feedback and vaccine availability for ages 5+, on January 3, 2022, mask wearing as a layered preventative measure for COVID-19 will transition from required to recommended and supported at Grand Island Public Schools. Other best-effort preventative measures such as staying home and getting tested when sick, contact tracing, HVAC ventilation, physical distancing where possible, and hand washing will remain in place.

Local COVID-19 testing sites may be found [HERE](#) courtesy of the Central District Health Department (CDHD).

Vaccine information for [kids ages 5 - 19](#) as well as [general vaccine info](#) are also available courtesy of the CDHD.

In accordance with Federal law, masks will be required when riding district-provided transportation of students. State Directive Health Measures, excess absentee rates, local health department/GIPS Health Services determinations, and prolonged or profound staffing/operational challenges may result in closures or required masking.

Students and staff that are sick and/or exhibiting symptoms are encouraged to stay home.

Classroom Exposure

- PROACTIVE PARENT COMMUNICATION:
 - Confirmed cases will continue to be reviewed on a case by case basis.
 - Contact tracing will be conducted in tandem with the CDHD as needed.

 - Elementary School positive cases in classrooms will be communicated with those grade levels.
 - Date of exposure
 - Grade level of positive case
 - Masks recommended reminder
 - Information from CDHD to monitor of symptoms

 - Middle School and High School positive cases will be communicated to parents by updating the [GIPS COVID dashboard](#).
 - Further communication will be shared on a case by case basis. That communication may include:
 - Date of exposure

- Grade or group level of positive cases
 - Masks recommended reminder
 - Information from CDHD to monitor of symptoms
 - Updated confirmed case snapshot by grade level on GIPS COVID dashboard
- If multiple cases occur in a secondary classroom or group of students, GIPS will work with CDHD to determine an appropriate response plan.

COVID-Related Classroom Closures:

- ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
 - 3 or more students and/or staff confirmed COVID cases per elementary classroom may result in closure for that classroom. Duration will be determined on a case by case basis with guidance from the CDHD.
 - Contact tracing will be conducted in tandem with the CDHD as needed.
 - Cases will continue to be reviewed on the [GIPS dashboard](#).
- MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOLS:
 - If a group of confirmed COVID cases (3 or more staff or students) is identified in a group of classes, cohorts, sports teams and the like, GIPS will work with CDHD to determine potential necessary closures by grade level or section or group for a short duration on a case by case basis. Duration will be determined on a case by case basis with guidance from the CDHD.
 - Contact tracing will be conducted in tandem with the CDHD as needed.
 - Cases will continue to be reviewed on the [GIPS dashboard](#).

School Closures

- PROACTIVE PARENT COMMUNICATION:
 - Parents will be notified as the medical/illness absentee rate gets closer to 5% encouraging masks and other monitoring precautions.
- BUILDING CLOSURES:
 - 8% or higher medical attributed absentee rate schoolwide may result in closure for that building.
 - Prior to or following a school building closure, masks may be required until the absentee rate subsides.
 - As we work closely with CDHD to identify potential building closure procedures, we will communicate with families as early as possible to share duration forecast.

Isolation Guidelines

- All students or staff that test positive for COVID-19 will be required to follow isolation guidelines as highlighted by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#):
 - Everyone, regardless of vaccination status:
 - Stay home for 5 days.
 - If you have no symptoms or your symptoms are resolving after 5 days, individuals may return to school but must wear a mask for up to an additional 5 days.
 - If you have a fever, continue to stay home until your fever resolves.

Quarantine Recommendation

- Staff and students that are exposed to confirmed positive cases are strongly recommended to follow quarantine guidelines as highlighted by the CDC (same as above).

Nurse's Office Visits

- Symptomatic students are required to wear a mask while in the nurse's office, isolation room, or while waiting to go home.

Staff Gatherings

- Masks are recommended for staff when attending indoor, congregate gatherings.
- Contact HR if accommodations are needed.

Events

- Mask wearing will be recommended at all GIPS events.

Disclaimer

- Please note, a scenario may arise of which we may revert back to universal masking if deemed necessary or mandated by the state or local officials.
- We will continue to move along with the pace of our community and work with our health officials as we have throughout this process to monitor, review, and adjust.

GIPS Safe Return to School

Grand Island Public Schools families, staff and community:

For staff and students, masks will be encouraged, supported, and optional unless "Substantial Transmission", as defined by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), occurs in Hall County as indicated by total new cases and the COVID-19 Community Safety Threshold defined below. However, in accordance with Federal law, masks will be required when riding district-provided transportation of students.

For visitors, which includes parents/families: masks are required indoors during the school day.

COVID-19 COMMUNITY SAFETY THRESHOLD

If COVID-19 cases in Hall County reach Substantial Transmission for two consecutive weeks and data indicating direct impact on schools such as illnesses, absences, and/or hospitalizations occur, GIPS will require universal and correct wearing of masks district wide for all students, staff, and visitors to help reduce spread of the disease until two consecutive weeks of lower than Substantial Transmission is reached and data indicating direct impact on schools such as illnesses, absences, and/or hospitalizations subside. CDC defines Substantial Transmission as 50 cases per 100,000 in the previous seven days. Masks or individual quarantines may also be required at specific schools in the event of school-based exposures or outbreaks or at the discretion of the Central District Health Department.

Continued high transmission of COVID-19 could require heightened safety protocols and a return to the previous school year's GIPS Reimagined model as recommended by the GIPS superintendent, Board of Education, and Central District Health Department. For more information on the Reimagined model, [click here](#).

Policy adaptations in place due to substantial transmission (August 18, 2021):

INCREASED SAFETY MITIGATIONS [Staff Experiencing Symptoms]

1. Notify your principal that you are experiencing symptoms. Administrators and supervisors are charged with maintaining a safe work and learning environment, and may elect to have you go or stay home.
2. Wear a multi-layer mask that completely covers your nose and mouth, fits snugly against the sides of your face without gaps, and has a nose wire to prevent leaking out of the top of the mask.
3. Seek testing. It is strongly recommended that unvaccinated and vaccinated people get tested for COVID-19. This is especially important if you have been around someone

who has tested positive for COVID-19.

4. Avoid meeting with staff in distances less than 6' and/or meet via Zoom until symptoms subside and/or a test returns negative.
 5. Eat away from others. Due to the high transmissibility of the Delta variant, find a place safe from others when removing your mask to eat.
 6. Wash or sanitize hands during all transitions, such as entering and leaving classrooms and other shared spaces.
- Places to get a free COVID-19 test: [Free Testing](#) (includes CVS, Walgreens, Walmart).

INCREASED SAFETY MITIGATION [Staff Experiencing More Severe Symptoms]

1. Notify your principal that you are experiencing more severe symptoms. Administrators and supervisors are charged with maintaining a safe work and learning environment and will help facilitate a sub.
 2. Avoid direct contact with other staff and students and seek medical care.
 3. Seek testing. It is strongly recommended that unvaccinated and vaccinated people get tested for COVID-19. This is especially important if you have been around someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 4. Any absence of 3 or more days requires a physician's note. Staff will return once they have been fever-free for 24 hours and symptoms have significantly reduced.
- Places to get a free COVID-19 test: [Free Testing](#) (includes CVS, Walgreens, Walmart).

Important Considerations:

- The COVID-19 Delta variant is the dominant strain in Hall County.
- Those infected with Delta carry higher levels in their respiratory tract making it more contagious than previous strains.
- COVID-19 cases, at the time of this writing, have increased substantially in the Central District Health Department (CDHD) area, including the community of Grand Island.
- Hall County is lower than the state and national vaccination rate averages, making it more vulnerable to the disease.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 12 years and older get a COVID-19 vaccine to help protect against the disease.
- The Central District Health Department offers COVID-19 vaccines Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., 1137 S Locust Street. Thursday clinics run until 8 p.m.. No appointment necessary. Those ages 12-18 need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. For more information, call (308) 385-5175.
- Due to the changing situation of COVID-19 and the more transmissible Delta variant, the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that all students, staff, and visitors wear masks indoors in PK-12 school settings, regardless of vaccination status. Wearing a mask remains one of the most effective ways to reduce transmission of COVID-19. Note, GIPS will continue to observe its Community Safety Threshold as defined above before requiring masks.

Reducing disease transmission is a community effort. GIPS thanks the community for their overwhelming support. Testing, quarantining when necessary, wearing a mask, cleaning, disinfection, upgraded ventilation, and vaccination remain key strategies for keeping in-person learning environments and the community more safe.

GIPS will continue to work closely with the Central District Health Department and local medical professionals to help maintain a safe school environment throughout the pandemic. GIPS will continue to gather research on COVID-19 from various sources including the local health department, the CDC, the Nebraska Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Education to keep parents, students, and the community informed.

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General Operations

2021-2022 COVID-19 Protocols

1. Staff/Students
 - a. Hand washing/sanitizing upon entering the school or start of school activities and during the day as needed.
 - b. Social distancing where possible.
 - c. Masks encouraged, supported, and optional onsite.

- d. Masks required when riding district-provided transportation.
- 2. Visitors
 - a. Masks are required indoors during the school day.
- 3. Staff/Students/Visitors: COVID-19 Community Safety Threshold
 - a. As outlined above, if prolonged Substantial Transmission of COVID-19 occurs in Hall County and data indicating direct impact on schools such as illnesses, absences, and/or hospitalizations occur, masks will be required by all students, staff, and visitors for the period defined.
 - b. In the event of school-based exposures or outbreaks, or at the discretion of the Central District Health Department, masks and quarantine may be required at specific schools.
 - c. Policy revision and adaptation may be required based on: (1) significant changes to CDC guidance on reopening schools and/or (2) changes to the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parent/Student Engagement and Involvement

- 1. Parents visiting during school hours will:
 - a. Sign in and out at the school office.
 - b. Follow COVID-19 Protocols outlined above.
- 2. Contacting administration/district/school
 - a. Let's Talk, available at www.gips.org or by [clicking here](#), is the preferred method when contacting district and school leadership.
 - b. Staff are available via email or by calling the school building. For the staff directory [click here](#) or go to the tab titled Directory at www.gips.org.
 - c. Schedule meetings in advance. Meetings can occur via Zoom or onsite.
- 3. Procedures
 - a. Parent/Teacher conferences will be scheduled onsite as indicated on the 2021-2022 School Calendar. Parents with COVID-19 related health concerns may contact your child's teacher to make alternative arrangements.

Mitigation Efforts

- 1. Monitor for symptoms
 - a. Please keep your child home and contact the school office if your child has any of the following:
 - i. a temperature of 100.0 or greater.
 - ii. episodes of vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours.
 - iii. an unexplained rash.
 - iv. new loss of taste or smell.
 - v. new onset of shortness of breath or cough.
 - vi. other symptoms that could indicate contagious illnesses.
 - b. Contact your school nurse if:

- i. you are unsure if your child should be at school.
 - ii. your child has been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19.
 - c. Students who have symptoms or have been exposed to a person who tested positive for COVID-19 may be excluded from school or asked to wear a mask. The duration is based on a number of factors determined in collaboration with district policy, the Central District Health Department, and local healthcare professionals.
2. Vaccinations
 - a. GIPS will be partnering with the Central District Health Department to periodically provide vaccine clinics at school campuses.
3. Testing
 - a. Partnerships with the local health department and community health clinics will be utilized to support diagnostic testing for students presenting with COVID-19-like symptoms.
 - b. Screening testing in collaboration with CDHD and community health clinics will be available where possible upon request.
4. Isolation rooms
 - a. Required under nurse supervision.
5. Cleaning expectations
 - a. Custodial staff will clean and disinfect as per CDC recommendations.
 - b. Teaching staff will have supplies to clean and disinfect surfaces as needed.
 - c. Lunch room tables and facilities will be cleaned and maintained by Kitchen and Custodial Staff.
6. Cohorting
 - a. Students will be grouped into the smallest cohort units possible to assist in appropriate contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine as necessary.
 - b. Facilities will be modified where possible to allow for physical distancing and cohorting.
7. Contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine
 - a. In collaboration with the Central District Health Department, contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine will be administered where determined necessary.
8. Air purification
 - a. Needlepoint Bi-polar Ionization systems are installed in all district facilities.
 - b. HVAC systems are on frequent air refresh cycles.
9. Respiratory Etiquette Expectations
 - a. Masks worn when experiencing cold, flu, and allergy-like symptoms such as congestion, cough, headache, or sore throat.
 - b. Handwashing after a sneeze or blowing one's nose.

Transportation

1. Bus stops and student travel
 - a. In accordance with Federal law, when transporting students all riders will be expected to wear masks at all times. To review the federal order, [click here](#).
 - b. Students will be expected to practice social distancing at the stop before boarding and while waiting for the bus to arrive.
 - c. Daily cleaning of buses.

Meals

Meals will be served at no cost to all students for the 2021-2022 school year. Full details on meals and Nutrition Services are available at www.gips.org under the tab titled "Services" or by [clicking here](#).

1. Onsite students
 - a. Hot lunches, more extensive menu items, add-ons, water, and self service condiments will be available.
 - b. Students will remain cohorted.
 - c. Nutrition Services will support schools who continue with breakfast in the classroom.
2. Virtual students
 - a. Communication will be given directly to virtual families and meals will be provided. Instructions will be provided at orientation.
3. Snacks and hydration
 - a. Snacks and food in class will be allowed with building administrator approval following food safety and Smart Snack guidelines for schools. For more information about Smart Snacks, [click here](#).
 - b. Water bottles, water stations, and drinking fountains will be available for use.

Continuity of Learning Expectations

Specific instructions by school level or individual buildings may be more detailed, but will follow these guidelines.

The School Day

1. Foster an inclusive and welcoming environment that respects teacher and student choice to wear masks.
2. Maintain grade level cohorts for instruction wherever possible.
3. Students need to remain in cohorts for lunch.
4. Students can share instructional materials and supplies.

5. Students can check out books.
6. Recess and PE activities will occur.
7. Building visitors and presenters check in/out at the office and follow protocols in place.
8. Students remain in classroom or grade level cohorts during assemblies.
9. Schedule field trips and student experiences as aligned to curriculum.
10. Sharing students-WIN time (flexible period to provide extra help or enrichments).

Activities Outside of School Day

1. 2021-2022 COVID-19 Protocols as defined above will be observed.
2. Travel is allowed following the GIPS Transportation guidelines outlined above.
 - a. Participants will adhere to activity host/destination safety protocols.

Community Use of Facilities

1. Community use of facilities is allowed and requires approval by the building principal/program director and the director of Buildings & Grounds.
2. Follow 2021-2022 COVID-19 Protocols outlined above.

Student Accommodations

1. Appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Staff

Respiratory Etiquette

The pandemic has caused all of us to re-think many aspects of our lives and how we conduct ourselves. It is important to acknowledge that not everyone necessarily agrees on the best ways to manage the pandemic, what precautions may need to be taken, and to what degree safety protocols should be enacted and enforced. As we live and work together, we strongly encourage and expect staff to treat each other with professionalism and compassion. It is not our responsibility to change others' minds; however, it is our responsibility to be respectful, empathetic, and compassionate towards those with whom we interact. Putting on a mask if you have a cold or are symptomatic, respecting another person's desire to meet via zoom rather than in-person, and honoring a request to keep socially distanced are examples contributing to a positive and collaborative work environment.

All Staff

All GIPS staff have been encouraged and provided opportunities to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the vaccine has been proven to be highly effective at preventing the transmission of COVID-19, as well as minimizing the symptoms and seriousness for anyone who contracts the virus. GIPS recognizes and supports each individual's right to decide for themselves whether to be vaccinated.

All staff are expected to report to their normal assignment for the 2021-2022 school year. Special accommodations related to COVID-19 made during the 2020-2021 school year have expired. Staff are required to report onsite for district and building work assignments, professional learning, and school improvement days.

All staff should continue to self monitor for illness, including the symptoms related to COVID-19, particularly for those staff who have not been vaccinated. Self-monitoring includes asking the following questions:

- a. Do I have any of the following that is new or I cannot explain:
 - i. Fever above 100.0 degrees
 - ii. Shortness of breath
 - iii. Cough
 - iv. Chills
 - v. Muscle pain
 - vi. Headache
 - vii. Sore throat
 - viii. New loss of taste or smell
 - ix. Congestion or runny nose
 - x. Nausea or vomiting
 - xi. Diarrhea
- b. All vaccinated and unvaccinated staff with symptoms are encouraged to get a COVID-19 test. This is especially important if they have been around someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

INCREASED SAFETY MITIGATION [Staff Experiencing Symptoms]

1. Notify your principal that you are experiencing symptoms. Administrators and supervisors are charged with maintaining a safe work and learning environment, and may elect to have you go or stay home.
2. Wear a multi-layer mask that completely covers your nose and mouth, fits snugly against the sides of your face without gaps, and has a nose wire to prevent leaking out of the top of the mask.
3. Seek testing. It is strongly recommended that unvaccinated and vaccinated people get tested for COVID-19. This is especially important if you have been around someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
4. Avoid meeting with staff in distances less than 6' and/or meet via Zoom until symptoms

- subside and/or a test returns negative.
5. Eat away from others. Due to the high transmissibility of the Delta variant, find a place safe from others when removing your mask to eat.
 6. Wash or sanitize hands during all transitions, such as entering and leaving classrooms and other shared spaces.
- Places to get a free COVID-19 test: [Free Testing](#) (includes CVS, Walgreens, Walmart).
 - c. Staff who are experiencing symptoms are encouraged to use discretion in deciding how they act around others. Choosing to put on a mask when entering a shared space and sanitizing hands after sneezing or blowing one's nose demonstrates a willingness to be conscientious about the wellbeing of your co-workers. Ultimately, administrators and supervisors are charged with maintaining a safe work and learning environment, and may elect to ask staff to take measures outlined above, or to go home until symptoms subside.
 - d. Staff with mild symptoms may report to work following the above discretions.

INCREASED SAFETY MITIGATION [Staff Experiencing More Severe Symptoms]

1. Notify your principal that you are experiencing more severe symptoms. Administrators and supervisors are charged with maintaining a safe work and learning environment and will help facilitate a sub.
 2. Avoid direct contact with other staff and students and seek medical care.
 3. Seek testing. It is strongly recommended that unvaccinated and vaccinated people get tested for COVID-19. This is especially important if you have been around someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 4. Any absence of 3 or more days requires a physician's note. Staff will return once they have been fever-free for 24 hours and symptoms have significantly reduced.
- Places to get a free COVID-19 test: [Free Testing](#) (includes CVS, Walgreens, Walmart).
 - e. Staff with more severe symptoms may elect to stay home and seek medical care. Any absence of 3 or more days requires a physician's note. Staff will return once they have been fever free for 24 hours and symptoms have significantly reduced.
 - f. Staff who have been exposed to a confirmed positive COVID-19 person, but do not exhibit symptoms themselves, should report to work as scheduled, and are encouraged to wear a mask and self monitor for symptoms.
 - g. **Effective August 1, 2021** there will not be paid pandemic leave (quarantine or isolation). The one exception will be for staff who have been vaccinated and are confirmed positive for COVID-19. In this instance, staff will be able to use pandemic paid leave until the conclusion of the isolation period. To be eligible for paid pandemic leave, staff will be required to provide the district with a copy of their vaccination card to verify completion of the vaccination protocols appropriate for the type of vaccine received.

Staff Accommodations

Any staff member who feels they need an accommodation, as provided for under the Americans with Disabilities Act, should notify the Human Resources Department for directions and consideration.

Social and Emotional Supports for Staff

As we are learning to adapt to a world and work environment where there is an active and on-going pandemic situation, we should be mindful of the emotional needs of our staff. Mental health needs can arise from a variety of stressors, i.e. fear, uncertainty, medical concerns, financial insecurity, family responsibilities, job responsibilities, providing elder care, etc. As a district, we should be aware of the guidelines and advice offered by experts to help and support staff. We will need to find the right balance between meaningful and effective support, being careful not to add unnecessary stress to a staff member's already full schedule.

District leadership can consider a variety of supports by:

1. Encouraging staff to utilize the Employee Assistance Program.
2. Creating intentional and purposeful ways to affirm staff and their work.
3. Incorporating mindfulness activities into the daily schedule and as part of meeting agendas.
4. Exercising good listening skills when staff are sharing needs/concerns.
5. Setting realistic goals and expectations.

Onboarding of Staff

1. COVID-19 Protocol Training
 - a. Safety procedures/protocols will be covered in new employee orientation as identified by the Safety Committee and Buildings & Grounds department.

In Conclusion

Grand Island Public Schools was one of a minority of districts across the United States who planned and executed an operational strategy to safely deliver five-day-a-week in-person instruction for the duration of the previous school year. This would not have been possible without the mutual trust and support of the community of Grand Island. Parents, students, staff, the Board of Education, medical professionals, frontline workers, and others tirelessly worked together to make this happen.

The community of Grand Island is resilient. We are not afraid to roll our sleeves up. We may not see eye to eye on all things, but we find ways to pull together in times of crisis. We did it after

the tornado outbreak in 1980. We did it during the floods of 2019, and we're doing it now during this pandemic.

We're entering the coming school year with fewer safety measures in place; however, at the time of this writing a COVID-19 vaccine is not yet available to those under 12 years of age. With the virus circulating in the community, washing hands, remaining socially distanced, and wearing a mask when experiencing symptoms will help with attendance and keep kids learning and growing. Getting a COVID-19 test when symptomatic, showing respiratory etiquette, and being respectful of the safety of others are essential measures to reducing local outbreaks and keeping case rates low in Hall county. As COVID-19 case rates remain below Substantial Transmission in the community, many classrooms will have a mix of students and staff wearing and not wearing masks. There will be individuals who wear a mask at all times and individuals who are wearing a mask due to exposure or experiencing symptoms. We respect this inclusive and new normal.

The community of Grand Island's work ethic is strong and so is our support of schools and the children that learn in them. Through all of the challenges of this pandemic, it remains the mutual trust and support between the community, parents, students, and GIPS staff that makes the special moments inside and outside of the classroom possible. It is with this spirit and perseverance that we look forward to the coming school year and the many more special moments our community will make possible.