

Portage Area School District

Health and Safety Plan

Version 2.2

July 8, 2020

Background

On March 13, 2020, Governor Wolf announced all public schools in Pennsylvania would be closed for two weeks in response to the spread of COVID-19. Within days, schools began developing continuity of education plans to ensure education continued during this unprecedented time. With the number of cases alarmingly increasing across the State, on March 30th, the Governor closed all school buildings for the remainder of the 19-20 school year.

As part of the phased reopening of Pennsylvania, the Portage Area School District is mandated to develop a Health and Safety Plan for the reopening of the 20-21 school year as guidelines for all instructional and non-instructional activities. Given the dynamic nature of this pandemic, this plan will be flexible and revised to adapt to changing conditions.

All community members must be mindful that as long as COVID-19 remains a medical concern, there are no strategies that can completely eliminate transmission risk within a school population. The goal of this plan is to minimize the spread of COVID-19 while continuing school activities. However, there will be some risk to all students and staff in spite of the school district's best efforts.

24 P.S Section 5-520.1

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recognizes that school leaders face many difficult decisions and challenges in planning for the start of the 2020-2021 school year and determining how to provide students with a minimum of 180 days of instruction and 900 hours of instruction at the elementary level and 990 hours of instruction at the secondary level. Section 520.1 of the School Code provides flexibility in the event of an emergency that prevents a school entity from being able to provide for the attendance of all pupils or usual hours of classes. PDE considers the World Health Organization-declared Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic an emergency as contemplated by section 520.1.

Accordingly, the Portage Area School District Board of Directors has the authority to enact temporary provisions as set forth in section 520.1 during the period of the pandemic response. In making decisions related to the provision of instructional time, the Portage Area School District will be cognizant of issues such as: the provision of planned instruction needed to attain the relevant academic standards set forth in Chapter 4; implementing systems of tracking attendance and instructional time, especially related to students engaging in remote instruction; the provision of FAPE; and equity in access to instruction for all students.

The current calendar of instructional days can be found at the district's web page:

www.portageareasd.org Modifications to instructional days/hours through temporary provisions are contained within this Health and Safety Plan. Any additional changes will be included for approval by the Portage Area School District Board of Directors as revisions to this plan. Such revisions will be submitted to PDE for Secretary of Education approval.

Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting, and Ventilation

Ensuring buildings and grounds are cleaned and disinfected are a priority of the Portage Area School District. Special equipment and cleaning supplies have been purchased to combat the spread of COVID-19 for the upcoming school year. Cleaning routines are in place to sanitize and disinfect frequently used items and high-traffic areas throughout the day to help prevent the spread of the virus. Shared materials/resources and communal areas will be cleaned and disinfected between uses. Movement within the buildings will be reduced as much as possible.

Social Distancing and Other Safety Protocols

Socialization is part of every child's education. Learning to interact with fellow students and staff is essential for the success of Portage Area students. Given the social distancing guidelines associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, students ability to socialize will be impacted. Whenever possible, the school district will prevent students coming into contact with each other. While the goal is to maintain six-foot distance between individuals, physical and financial concerns may place students closer. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a three-foot distance is associated with large reductions in infection via droplet spread of cough and sneezes. In those instances, where maintaining six-foot social distancing is unrealistic, students may be asked to practice enhanced personal hygiene and wear masks.

Face Coverings

On July 1, 2020, Governor Wolf and Dr. Rachel Levine ordered the wearing of face coverings by all individuals in any members where members of the public are generally permitted. According to a July 3, 2020 message from PDE, , this Order applies to all individuals while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), intermediate units (IUs); educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential settings (boarding schools), residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings; PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Programs and Preschool Early Intervention programs; and Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities.

For the safety of students, staff and families, and to avoid community spread of COVID-19, students and staff are considered to be members of the public who are congregating in indoor locations. As such, they are required to adhere to this Order.

The Order is effective immediately and applies to all children aged two and older.

This Order remains in effect until further notice.

Schools may allow students to remove their face coverings when students are:

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart;
- Seated at desks or assigned work spaces at least 6 feet apart; or
- Engaged in any activity at least 6 feet apart (e.g. face covering breaks, recess, etc.).

Any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield.

Athletes must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of the Order. Coaches, athletes and spectators must wear face coverings unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet. Athletes are not required to wear face coverings while actively engaged in workouts and competition that prevent the wearing of face coverings, but must wear face coverings when on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. and anytime 6 feet of social distancing is not possible.

Cafeteria

A particularly vulnerable area for the spread of the virus is in the cafeteria settings. The school district will be instituting additional lunch periods and modifying seating to maintain as large of space between students as possible. As a safety precaution, students and staff will be required to wear face masks while in the serving line.

The school district has instituted procedures for students/staff traversing the hallways and stairwells with social distancing in mind. The changing of classes will be modified to reduce student interactions as much as possible. As a safety precaution, students and staff will be required to wear face masks when moving from room to room.

School Visitation

To protect students and staff, visitors and volunteers to the buildings will be on an only as-necessary basis with protocols in place. Whenever possible, the school district will rely on phone calls, e-mail, or videoconferencing to conduct business with visitors. In those instances where a face-to-face meeting must occur, the school district will monitor individuals for signs of illness prior to entry into the building. This will include a temperature scan. Those individuals with temperatures in excess of 100.4 or showing other signs of illness will be denied entry. As a safety precaution, all visitors will be required to wear a face mask while in the buildings.

Monitoring Student and Staff Health

Compulsory Attendance

The Portage Area Board of School Directors believes that daily attendance is an integral part of an effective educational environment. Daily attendance and active participation in each class is a critical part of the learning process. A significant role of today's schools is to help students learn to understand and appreciate the importance of punctuality and regular attendance. Evidence points to the fact that regular school attendance has a positive carry-over to the world of work. Our policies and procedures established

at Portage Area School District are designed to help students learn responsibility and increase their potential for success.

Attendance is primarily the responsibility of students and parents. The school best serves the home by establishing clear attendance expectations and providing a timely reporting of student's attendance patterns.

Every parent, guardian, or other person responsible for any child or children of compulsory school age is required to send such child or children to school. The educational program offered by this District is predicated upon the presence of the pupil and requires continuity of instruction and classroom participation. Pennsylvania State Board of Education (PSBOE); Public School Code 1949, Section 13-1327

Act 29 establishes penalties for truancy. The act places a fine of \$300 on parents for truancy and requires parents to pay court costs or be sentenced to complete a parent education program. Under PA's Act 138 the parent must appear at a hearing before the district justice if the child is under age 15. If 15 years of age or older a citation may be filed against both the student and parent/caregiver. In addition, Act 138 may remove a truant juvenile's driving privileges and imposed increased fines upon the parent/caregiver. A parent/caregiver may be jailed for no more than 3 days if the student's truant behavior continues.

PA State Law (Section 1333.1, Act 138) requires every parent, guardian or person in parental relation having control or charge of any child of compulsory school age, who fail to comply with the provisions of compulsory attendance, shall be sentenced to the following penalties:

- Parent/Guardian(s) and/or student fined up to \$300 plus court costs. \$500 2nd offense, \$750 3rd offense.
- Parent/Guardian(s) and/or student must perform community service.
- Parent/Guardians(s) must take a parenting education class.
- Student driver's license revoked/student prohibited from applying for a learner's permit.
- Family referred to CYS for continued violations of PA School Attendance laws.

Lawful Absences Verified by Written Excuses

The following conditions constitute reasonable cause for lawful absence from classes/school:

- Illness / Quarantined
- Recovery from accident
- Required court attendance
- Death in the family
- Approved religious holidays
- Approved educational travel (not to exceed 5 school days per year)
- Other "urgent reasons" to be considered only if it directly affects the student and is agreed to by the school administration: such as verified medical or dental appointment or family emergency

Unlawful/unexcused Absences

Absences, from school for reasons other than those listed above, are considered unlawful/unexcused absences and subject to legal action prescribed by the PA compulsory attendance laws and other actions prescribed by the School District's Attendance Policy.

- Unlawful Absence - Unlawful Absence: One in which the student is less than eighteen (18) years of age fails to provide school officials with the proper documentation/excuse regarding his or her absences.
- Unexcused Absence - Unexcused Absence: One in which the student is eighteen (18) years of age or older and fails to provide school officials with the proper documentation/excuse regarding his or her absence.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school district will alter the truancy policy to allow a maximum of twenty (20) parental excuses for lawful absences. After twenty total absences excused by parent/guardian, including parental requests for educational travel, medical evidence must be provided by a licensed medical professional for all future absences. Failure to provide medical evidence within three days of absences will result in the absence being unlawful/unexcused.

Impact of COVID-19 on Attendance

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. Someone can become infected by coming into close contact with a person who has the COVID-19 virus. This can occur when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks in proximity to an uninfected person. It can also be spread by an uninfected person touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

According to the CDC, the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading very easily and sustainably between people. To minimize the risk of transmission of COVID-19, the CDC recommends practicing social distancing, wearing a face mask, routinely cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often with soap and water. In spite of best efforts, people in the community will inevitably contract COVID-19.

In order to protect the health and safety of Portage Area students and staff, the first line of defense is self-monitoring. People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

- 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

According to the CDC, if you think someone in the household might have COVID-19, these actions are recommended:

- Stay home except to get medical care
- Separate yourself from other people
- Monitor your symptoms
- Call ahead before visiting your doctor
- Wear a cloth covering over your nose and mouth
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Clean hands often
- Avoid sharing personal household items
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces everyday

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

The first step in protecting the health and safety of students and staff of the Portage Area School District occurs each morning within the home. Everyone should self-monitor their own health for signs of illness. The most common signs and symptoms include fever greater than 100.4, cough, shortness of breath, headaches, fatigue, loss/altered sense of taste or smell, diarrhea, and runny nose/congestion. In the event you show signs or symptoms of illness, please stay home and/or seek medical attention. Normal attendance requirements will remain in effect.

Students and staff exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or living in a household with someone exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home at least ten (10) days from the first sign of symptoms **AND** until no signs of fever without medication are present for at least three (3) days unless medically cleared otherwise. During periods of quarantine or isolation, students are expected to continue their education through the district’s on-line learning portal.

Research has indicated one of the greatest first indicators of exposure to the COVID-19 virus is a fever. As part of the district’s plan to monitor student and staff health, temperature scans will be conducted before any student boards a school bus or enters the building. Those individuals with temperatures in excess of 100.4 will be denied entry. Parents/guardians should plan for child-care in the event their child is not permitted to attend school. The buses are not able to wait for ill students while arrangements are made for a child showing signs of a fever.

In order to accommodate time for temperature scanning of all students boarding the school buses, the school district will be modifying the school day. The Jr/Sr High School will operate from 8:15 to 3:00; the Elementary School will operate from 9:00 to 3:45. Students arriving to school via personal transportation will be monitored before entering the building.

Students and staff exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 during school hours should immediately put on a mask and report to the nurse’s office. The nurse will assess the student/teacher, including a temperature check and questions about any pre-existing conditions that may explain the symptoms. As

necessary, the nurse will contact a parent/guardian to arrange for student transportation off-site. Individuals with temperatures above 100.4 will be required to leave the building regardless of the cause. Until parent/guardian personal transportation arrives, the student will be placed in quarantine. Students or staff members may return to school when medical clearance is granted.

Other Considerations for Students and Staff

Technology

Using assorted grants and the school district's general fund, the Portage Area School District will institute a 1:1 initiative to provide all students and staff a portable computer for the 20-21 school year. These devices are expected to be used both at school and at home. The school district will be applying for the use of up to ten flexible instructions days to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In the event schools are closed due to the COVID-19 virus or for any other reason, education will transition from the traditional classroom setting to online.

Graduation Requirements

In order to protect students, the school district will suspend the community service hour requirement for the 20-21 school year. Additionally, the independent reading requirement will also be suspended for the 20-21 school year given students' access to library resources.

On-Line Learning

The Portage Area School District recognizes some students and/or families may not be comfortable returning to school, especially those with a higher risk for severe illness. For those students unable to return this Fall, special accommodations are in place allowing students to continue their education through on-line resources.

In the event the school district is forced to close its facilities due to the pandemic, each student's education will transition from face-to-face classrooms to on-line synchronous instruction. Using technology devices provided by the school district, students will be expected to actively engage in daily lessons. Student attendance will be monitored according to the district's attendance policy.

Those students/parents with unique circumstances should contact either Superintendent Eric Zelanko or the appropriate building principal to discuss available options.