

Portage Area School District

Health and Safety Plan

Version 6.0

October 27, 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.

Notice Regarding Return to School

As the beginning of the academic year approaches, the Portage Area School District wishes to address the challenges associated with returning to in-person instruction for our District staff, students, and parents. The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, is extremely contagious and continues to remain a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization. COVID-19 is believed to spread mainly from person-to-person contact and has had severe consequences for those that are especially vulnerable, such as senior citizens and individuals with underlying medical conditions. As a result, federal, state, and local governments and federal and state health agencies have made numerous recommendations over the past months to fight the spread of infection, including increased handwashing and social distancing measures to limit contact with others.

The District has put in place preventative measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Governor Wolf's Executive Orders, the Pennsylvania Department of Health and other agencies, as more fully outlined in the District's Health and Safety Plan, to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to allow students and parents to feel comfortable about returning to in-person instruction within the school setting. Even with preventative measures in place, there are inherent risks as the risk of infection for COVID-19 exists and is difficult to control.

We need families, parents and students to understand the contagious nature of COVID19 and the risk of infection and injury associated with use of District transportation, in person instruction, and participation in District programs and activities. We cannot guarantee that you or your children will not become infected with COVID-19 as a result of the aggressive nature in which this virus may spread. Families, parents and students must understand the potential for infection, injury, or even death as a result of COVID-19 that exists when using District transportation or participating in District instructional programs and activities. An inherent risk of exposure to COVID-19 exists in any place where people are present.

We understand your concerns, and the School District has taken enhanced health and safety measures to create the safest environment feasibly possible during this pandemic. We require that all students and their families follow all posted instructions as provided by the School District's Health and Safety Plan for the health and well-being of all.

Parents that are uncomfortable with in person instruction should contact the building principal and/or superintendent to discuss available options for the academic year, such as virtual instruction through our District's cyber instruction platform.

Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting, and Ventilation

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly spread through respiratory droplets. When someone infected with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes, respiratory droplets that contain the virus are expelled and can be breathed in by someone nearby. Face coverings are one preventive measure utilized to prevent the spread of this illness. Although the virus cannot enter the body through the skin, the respiratory

droplets carrying the virus can get into a person's airways or mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth to cause infection. The virus can also be spread if a person touched a contaminated surface and then touched their eyes, nose, or mouth, although this is not the primary way the virus spreads.

Ensuring buildings and grounds are cleaned, sanitized and disinfected are a priority of the Portage Area School District. Routine cleaning and disinfecting are key to maintaining a safe environment for students and staff. Special equipment and cleaning supplies have been purchased to combat the spread of COVID-19 for the upcoming school year. All disinfectants are EPA approved for use to combat COVID-19 and are safe for food and no-food contact. Routines are in place to clean, 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, sanitized, and disinfected between uses. Movement within the buildings will be reduced as much as possible.

Definitions

CLEANING - Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

DISINFECTING – Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. The process does not clean dirty surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it lowers the risk of spreading infection.

SANITIZING - Sanitizing lowers the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process works by either cleaning or disinfecting surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.

Routines

The cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces and objects will occur daily or more depending on use patterns. Examples of such surfaces and objects to be cleaned and disinfected include:

- Door knobs and handles
- Stair rails/hand rails
- Sinks, toilet bowls, and faucets
- Classroom desks and chairs
- Cafeteria tables and chairs
- Countertops
- Light switches
- Equipment handles
- Machinery pushbuttons
- Shared tools and equipment
- Remote controls
- Telephones
- Bus seats and handrails
- Garbage cans

Due to the difficulties associated with cleaning computer keyboards, students will be expected to use devices provided through the district's 1:1 technology initiative whenever possible. In situations where computers with specialized software are required, keyboard covers will be cleaned and disinfected before and after use.

Hand Washing

According to the CDC, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the COVID-19 virus. After use of a face covering, the next best preventive measure is hand washing with soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds after having been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. It is especially important to wash hands in school:

- Before eating or preparing food
- Before touching the face
- After using the restroom
- After leaving a public space
- After blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After handling a cloth face mask

If soap and water are not readily available, use of a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol is recommended. Hand sanitizer dispensers are available in all classrooms and common areas within the buildings.

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 will be asked to practice enhanced personal hygiene and wear face coverings.

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 face coverings when students are:

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task; or
- At least 6 feet apart during “face-covering breaks” to last no longer than 10 minutes.

Children two years and older are required to wear a face covering unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA, that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Accommodations for such students should be made in partnership with the student’s health care provider, school nurse, and IEP/504 team.

Due to the difficulty of younger students keeping a face mask in place, the school district has purchased face shields for students in Pre-K to Grade 2. These shields are made specifically for younger students. The clear plastic shield covers eyes, nose and mouth and includes a cute graphic as part of the headband.

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.

Desk Shields - The school district is providing “desk shields” to better isolate students in the classroom. Made of corrugated plastic, these L-shaped shields with clear “windows” along with desk spacing in the classroom will offer additional protection to students while seated in the classroom. Students who move from room to room will be issued a personal “desk shield” to use throughout the day. These personal desk shields may be appropriately personalized by the student. At the end of each day, these shields will be returned to the students’ homeroom. Students in classrooms for an entire day will be seated at the same desk each day, thereby using the same desk shield. All desk shields will be disinfected by the custodial staff before the start of the next day.

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.

Unless registered as a full-time remote learner, students are expected to be present at school.

In situations where a child is ill, isolated, or quarantined, students are encouraged to engage in remote learning. However, a student will still be marked with an absence. The school district will base the absence on the appropriate criteria.

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.

Students and staff living in a household with someone with confirmed COVID-19 should stay at home at least fourteen (14) days from the positive test result unless medically cleared otherwise. During these 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 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.

In order to better serve the health and safety of students and staff, the school district will continue with modifications to 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 will have temperatures 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.

DOH or county and municipal health departments (CMHDs) staff will notify the school district immediately upon learning that a person with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 was present at the school or a school event while infectious. DOH or CMHD staff will assist the school with risk assessment, isolation and quarantine recommendations, and other infection control recommendations. Schools will take every measure to maintain the confidentiality of the affected individual.

It is the responsibility of DOH or CMHD staff to contact a student or staff person with COVID-19, inform close contacts of their possible exposure, and give instructions to those involved, including siblings and other household members, regarding self-quarantine and exclusions. The individual who tested positive will not be identified in communications from DOH or the CMHD to the school

community at large but may need to be selectively identified for contact tracing by the DOH or CMHD staff.

The school district will contact local DOH or CMHD staff before acting in response to a known or suspected communicable disease. DOH and CMHDs will provide guidance to schools regarding disease information, appropriate letters and communications, identification of high-risk individuals, appropriate action and treatment, and on-going support and assistance.

- If the person is present on school property when DOH or CMHD staff notify the school of the positive case information, the person should immediately, but discreetly, be taken to the COVID-19 related isolation space for pick up (if student) or asked to return home (if staff).
- Plan for transportation of sick individuals to their homes.
- Contact DOH or the CMHD for further guidance if a parent/guardian/caregiver notifies the school of potential exposure by a student, staff member, or school visitor.
- The entire building does not need to be evacuated.
- Wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting. If not feasible, wait as long as possible. If seven days have passed since the sick individual was in the affected area, cleaning is not needed.
- Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use again before cleaning and disinfecting. Follow [CDC Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) protocols.
- Create a communication system to self-report symptoms and for notifying staff and families of exposures and closures. Schools should, however, take every measure to maintain the confidentiality of the affected individual.

Contact Tracing

Robust surveillance, case investigation, contact tracing and isolation of positive cases or quarantine of close contacts can slow and stop the transmission of COVID-19. Pennsylvania's public health infrastructure of epidemiologists, community health nurses, and CMHD staff are the backbone of this work. More information on contact tracing and case investigation can be found in [DOH'S Contact Tracing Plan](#).

DOH and its CMHD partners have established procedures for timely communication with school districts when there is a probable or positive COVID-19 case. Local DOH staff or the CMHD will notify the school district and PDE immediately upon learning that someone who tested positive for COVID-19 was present at the school or school event while infectious. DOH or CMHD staff will assist the school district with risk assessment, isolation and quarantine recommendations, and other infection control recommendations.

DOH or CMHD staff will assist the school district with contact tracing and may request information regarding potential close school contacts from school nurses/health staff. Decisions to track additional health information (i.e., quarantine timeframes) will be made at the local school level.

DOH Consultative Assistance

It is important to note that a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based instructional model more quickly. DOH will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

<u>Level of Community Transmission in the County</u>	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a 14-day period: 1 student or 1 staff	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a 14-day period: 2-4 students/staff in same school building OR <5% of total number of students/staff in a school building are cases OR Multiple school buildings with individual cases who are not household contacts	Number of Cases of COVID-19 Within a 14-day period: 5+ students/staff in same school building OR ≥5% of total number of students/staff in a school building are cases OR Multiple school buildings with 2-4 cases who are not household contacts
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School does not need to close Clean area(s) where case spent time Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close school(s) for 3-5 days* Clean area(s) where cases spent time Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close school(s) for 14 days* Clean entire school(s) Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School does not need to close Clean area(s) where case spent time Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close school(s) for 5-7 days* Clean area(s) where cases spent time Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close school(s) for 14 days* Clean entire school(s) Public health staff will direct close contacts to quarantine
Substantial	DOH and PDE recommend a Full Remote Learning Model for all schools in counties with substantial level of community transmission	DOH and PDE recommend a Full Remote Learning Model for all schools in counties with substantial level of community transmission	DOH and PDE recommend a Full Remote Learning Model for all schools in counties with substantial level of community transmission

*When an entire school is recommended to close, lengths of closure time will vary by level of community transmission and number of cases. This allows public health staff the necessary time to complete case investigations and contact tracing, and to provide schools with other appropriate public health advice like cleaning and disinfecting.

Other Considerations for Students and Staff

Learning Model

On Monday, August 10th, the Departments of Health and Education provided recommendations to schools for use when making decisions related to the instructional models used during the 2020-21 school year. It is important to note that a safe return to in-person instruction will look different across every school, district, and county depending on a variety of factors, one of which is the spread of COVID-19. School entity decisions on instructional models require a great deal of consideration of local factors including size of the school entity, classroom size, school resources, proportion of staff and students with special needs and underlying health conditions, and the ability to accommodate remote learning with equal access for all students.

The recommendations contained in the guidance rely on two standard public health metrics: **incidence rate** and the **percent positivity** of diagnostic testing. These metrics are available for every county in Pennsylvania on the [COVID-19 Early Warning Monitoring System Dashboard](#). Relying on county incident rates and the percent positivity of diagnostic testing, Cambria County has been identified with a **MODERATE** level of community transmission.

Entering the second marking period – a gradual return to Face-to-Face Learning Model

Opinions vary on how to move forward with school on November 2nd. COVID-19 is creating plenty of havoc among schools across the area, state and nation. While some are moving forward with a regular school day, others are transitioning to fully remote learning. In our area, the trend is for a return to full face-to-face learning, especially for elementary-aged students. In that regard, Portage Area has been ahead of the curve.

At the same time, schools are being forced to transition to remote learning when an incident of the virus appears. While the PA Department of Health was slated to perform contact tracing, that duty is falling on school districts. It is now the district's job to inform DOH of those students who have been within six feet of an infected individual for more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour time period. DOH will then officially place those individuals in quarantine. The district has also been asked to inform those individuals to self-quarantine as DOH is overwhelmed with making contacts.

While the Portage area has been spared the brunt of the virus, we are beginning to see an uptick in cases in our zip code. While not excessive, it indicates the virus is here. As more people are being tested and people are forced inside because of the cooler temperatures, we can expect to see positive cases increase. According to Dr. Levine at DOH, we have entered the second wave of the pandemic.

One of the greatest impediments to a return to face-to-face learning model is that the physical space within classrooms makes it impossible to maintain six feet social distancing. However, face coverings, desktop shields, and constant cleaning/disinfecting reduce some of the risk. While temperature scans of students using school or personal transportation before entering our facilities was a good preventive measure, the technology doesn't exist to continue. Instead, scans are conducted as students enter the building

Like so many things in life, the best way to avoid bad things happening is to not participate. If you are afraid of losing money in the stock market, don't invest. If you don't want a sunburn, don't go outside in

the sunshine. If you don't want a speeding ticket, don't drive over the posted limits. If you want to reduce your chances of getting lung cancer, don't smoke. If you don't want exposed to COVID-19, don't leave your house. If there was ever a risk/reward situation, this is it. It is up to the individual to determine how much risk they are willing to accept. However, in this situation, students, parents, and staff must live with the decision of the school district.

Taking all of this information into consideration and with no clear answer, the Portage Area School District will move forward with a gradual return of Grade 9 through 12 students for face-to-face instruction beginning on Nov 2nd. Students in Grades K through 8 will remain on the previously established schedule with one exception. The district will eliminate for all students the half day face-to-face instruction with afternoon remote learning on Wednesdays. Instead, Wednesday's will be full day of face-to-face instruction.

Students in Grades K through 8

In order to reduce class size to allow social distancing of six feet or more, the school district will temporarily reassign some staff with the understanding these individuals will return to their previous position when this crisis is over. The school district may also employ staff on a temporary basis to allow for social distancing within classrooms. The school district has suspended some programs such as K4 program and RTII/MTSS to make staff available for reassignment. Posting of any permanent vacancies will be in accordance with the collective bargaining unit between the Portage Area Education Association and the school district.

Students in Grades 9 through 12

Based on the level of community transmission data, especially the number cases from the 15946-zip code, the district will begin implementing a gradual return of students beginning November 2nd. This schedule may be quickly altered based on data provided by the PA DOH.

In the event the district becomes aware of a positive COVID-19 case within the school community, it may be possible classes transition to a fully remote learning model while contact tracing is conducted. Students identified as close contacts will be required to participate in remote learning during their quarantine period. Depending on the severity of the situation, buildings and/or the entire school district may be required to transition to a remote learning model for an extended period of time.

Students in Grades 9 through 12 will return to the face-to-face instruction based on the following plan:

Nov 2nd

- 1. School will be open five days per week for students in Grades 9-12 who are enrolled in an Admiral Peary vocational program.**
2. IEP students will continue to have the option of attending school five days per week.
3. Students in Grades 9-12 who have elected a fully remote learning model may continue with that learning model.
4. All other Grade 9-12 students will remain in hybrid learning although the district will abandon the half-day Wednesdays in favor of a full day. As has been done, Wednesdays will rotate between Green and White teams for those who continue with the hybrid learning model.

Nov 9th

1. **School will be open five days per week for students in Grades 9-12 who are enrolled in an Admiral Peary vocational program.**
2. **School will be open five days per week for students in Grades 9 and 10.**
3. Students in Grades 9-12 who have elected a fully remote learning model may continue with that learning model.
4. Those Grade 9 and 10 students who wish to remain in a hybrid learning model will attend school based on the Green/White calendar.
5. Students in Grades 11 and 12 who are not vocational students will continue with the hybrid learning model as per Green/White calendar.

Nov 16th

1. **School will be open five days per week for all students in Grades 9 thru 12.**
2. Students in Grades 9-12 who have elected a fully remote learning model may continue with that learning model.
3. Students in Grades 9 thru 12 who wish to remain in a hybrid learning model will attend school based on the Green/White calendar.

Nov 26th and beyond

1. **School will be open five days per week for all students in Grades 9 thru 12.**
2. Students in Grades 9-12 who have elected a fully remote learning model may continue with that learning model.
3. Students in Grades 9 thru 12 who wish to remain in a hybrid learning model will attend school based on the Green/White calendar.

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, special accommodations are in place allowing students to continue their education through on-line resources. **Students may switch from an on-line learning environment to the traditional face-to-face learning model at natural breaks in the school year, i.e. end of marking period or major holidays.**

The school district will offer several different on-line learning opportunities for students. Parents do not have to enroll their children in a charter cyber school for health and safety concerns to access an on-line learning environment. The school district will be using district developed on-line courses as well as some provided by the Intermediate Unit. Students opting for one of these alternatives can remain a "Mustang."

Using Microsoft Teams, teachers will provide each day's lesson along with assignments for students who elect to complete their education remotely. A camera and microphone within the classroom will broadcast instruction as if a student was sitting in the classroom. Students will be able to communicate with the teacher both during and other designated times throughout the school week. Students will be expected to actively engage in daily lessons. These classes will be taught by a school district teacher.

A second on-line option is the IU 8's Extended Campus program. These classes are taught by area teachers using commercially available coursework. Students may enroll in single courses or a full schedule of classes.

The final option is Virtual High School. The district has been using this on-line learning opportunity a number of years to provide more specialized coursework to students. These classes are taught by instructors from across the country.

More information is available by contacting the appropriate building principal.

If a parent/guardian is uncomfortable sending a child back to the school building for COVID-19 concerns, it is only natural to think these same concerns would extend to extra-curricular activities. The same safety precautions being taken in the classroom setting are very similar to steps being taken in the district's extra-curricular activities. Students electing a remote learning option may not participate in district sponsored extra-curricular activities.

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. Students will be expected to actively engage in daily lessons. Student attendance will be monitored according to the district's attendance policy.

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. Because of the pandemic, the availability of technology to consumers has been extremely limited. At this time, the estimated time of arrival of the devices the school district ordered is unknown.

Flexible Instruction Days

The school district has applied for and been approved for the use of up to five flexible instruction days (FIDs) 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.