

Safe Return to School Plan

2023-2024



Sterling Public Schools will again be open in the fall of 2021 for in-person instruction and learning. We will continue to work closely with our local health department and state officials in the event that an outbreak of Covid-19 or variant occurs within our school district. We also will continue to gather information from various sources including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), and the U.S. Department of Education. We will utilize, only if needed, the protocols that were put in place from our 2020-2021 Reopening Plan. Adjustments to the plan will also be made as practicable based on local community conditions and feedback received from stakeholder groups. This work will be ongoing as new research emerges and more guidance is provided to the school district in the future.

In this updated “Return to School” Plan, Sterling Public Schools will also continue to utilize our facilities and resources in a manner that maximizes student safety and learning.

Masking

- Wearing of masks is recommended, but not required.
- If masks are worn, promote universal and correct etiquette.
- Face mask may be required temporarily for staff, students, and visitors if Covid-19 cases rise and the administration believes that this safety precaution is necessary to prevent further spread and possible school closure.

Visitors

- Parents will be allowed to walk their children to our school buildings in line with pre-Covid protocols.
- Visitors will be allowed during the school days in line with pre-Covid protocols.
 - Visitors must check in at the main office upon arrival.
- Non-essential visitors and volunteers may be limited if case levels increase.

Student Attendance

- All students who are enrolled in the school district are required to attend school on all days when school is open for providing instruction, unless they are excused from attendance by law.
- Students who need to quarantine due to COVID-19 contraction or exposure, or students who stay home because they have COVID-19 related symptoms, are expected to make up missed school work and learning in the same manner as for any illness-related missed school days as outlined in the student handbooks and board policy.
- All COVID-19 related missed school days will be treated as medically-excused absences with a doctor's note.

Cleaning/Sanitation/Maintenance of Facilities

- Proper hand washing, cough, and sneeze etiquette will be reinforced and monitored.
- Water fountains and refilling stations will be reopened for use. Please continue to bring individual water bottles.
- Hand sanitizer dispensers will be available throughout the building.
- Restrooms will be sanitized daily.
- High touch surfaces areas will be sanitized frequently.
- Students and staff will be encouraged to wash and sanitize their hands frequently.

Transportation

- Bus routes and activity trips will operate at full student capacity.
- Drivers shall stay home if they have a fever or other COVID-19 related symptoms.
- All vehicles will be sanitized daily.
- Masks can be worn on buses according to individual discretion and will be available to passengers if needed.
- Students and parents will be encouraged to self-screen for cold or flu-like symptoms prior to coming to the vehicle.

Vaccinations

- COVID-19 vaccines will not be required for students or staff.
- Please note that each individual's vaccination status is based on a self-identified system.
- Proof of vaccination may be required in individual circumstances, but is generally not required for admittance to school. Information will not be shared with others.
- We will communicate information about COVID-19 vaccine and promote local vaccination clinics in our region.

Isolation/Quarantine

- All Directed Health Measures in the state of Nebraska were removed on May 24, 2021. A confirmed positive individual following the isolation guidelines are now a function of personal responsibility.
- School-related contacts to a positive COVID-19 case who remain asymptomatic are not currently recommended for quarantine. If enhanced practices are reinstated, Sterling Public Schools will cooperate with adjusted guidance in the area.
- Normal health procedures for illnesses will continue to be followed as normal:
 - Students and staff who are sick must stay home.
 - Students and staff must be fever free for 24 hours (without medication) before returning to school.
- Students will continue to be excused for COVID-related absences with a doctor's note.
- The district will utilize the contact tracing guidelines from both the CDC & Public Health Solutions.

Diagnostic and Screening

- Continue to encourage students and staff to self-screen daily.
- Anyone displaying signs of illness will need to stay home for 24 hours.
- There will not be any temperature screenings at the beginning of the school day.
 - Please note: If COVID cases rise, on-site symptom checks may be reinstated for everyone entering a district building or site if needed.
- If during the day a student becomes ill or develops a fever, students will be offered a mask and be placed in isolation to prevent possible spread of any illness.
- Families are encouraged to screen students for COVID symptoms before sending students to school or activities.

Accommodations for Children with Disabilities

- Students with special needs will have access to all safety protocols discussed as well as safety measures agreed to in the IEP.
- Students with underlying health conditions may participate in remote learning if the school is provided with medical documentation indicating that this is necessary.

- Students with disabilities may be prioritized for in-person learning if cases rise to the level where hybrid or home-based learning is required.

Continuity of Services

- Our goal is to continue to provide “in-person” learning to all students, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs via the many programs in the place within our schools.
- We will return to a regular school year schedule that follows our normal curriculum, assessment, activities, and parent-teacher conferences.
- Breakfast and lunch may be provided to students through the USDA approved system.
- All special education services will be provided according to students’ IEP, and families will be provided with access to free meals as needed.
- If COVID cases rise significantly and we are required to close school, every effort will be made to provide services virtually.

Communication

- Sterling Public Schools will utilize a number of communication methods to ensure parents, students, staff, and the community are all informed of potential changes.
- Phone, email, and text messages will be sent through Powerschool, the district website, and various social media platforms.
- To help us maximize these communication channels, it is vital that all students and families are registered in Powerschool for the 2021-2022 school year and that all parent/guardian information is updated and current.
- If you have any questions, please contact the office.

While we understand that there are still many decisions to be made, we are confident this plan can be adjusted as needed to meet the changing conditions and extenuating circumstances. We have the best interests of our students, families, staff, and community in mind during our planning and commitment to education. Keeping our children safe and secure is one of our main priorities. Thank you for being a part of our district and thank you for your understanding and flexibility during these uncertain times. We hope that there are no disruptions this year.

If you have any questions regarding this plan, please feel free to contact us at 402-866-4761.

Go Big Jets!

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Reviewed: 8/8/22, 8/7/23