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**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**  
**GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
Blandford Chester Huntington Middlefield Montgomery Russell

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August 24, 2021

Dear Gateway Families,

We are excited to welcome students and staff for the 21-22 school year! I am looking forward to getting to know you and working collaboratively to support our students.

It is certainly a unique time to begin my superintendency at Gateway Regional. With the global pandemic taking a toll on our lives in many ways, **it is important that the school district prioritize student safety and learning in this upcoming year.** The administrative team has been planning all summer after receiving guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and working with the local board of health and medical experts here in the district. We are fortunate that we can put a combination of safeguards in place to ensure that we are supporting our students and maintaining an engaging and rigorous learning environment.

The plans included in this document will go into effect after approval by the school committee at their meeting on August 25. The school committee may vote to adjust the proposal or to request I submit a revised proposal for their consideration. It is important to note that these **plans may continue to shift as the district receives additional directives** and information from a number of sources. We are planning for school opening based on what we know now, but at any time, the school district may need to change gears because of a mandate from Governor Baker or DESE or our local officials.

Also, please know that **Massachusetts school districts are required to be in person, full time, five days per week.** Unlike last year, the district is not permitted to offer remote or hybrid learning models. We know that this lack of flexibility may be challenging for some families, but this means that everyone is very focused on making our in-person learning truly great for all students!

I welcome the opportunity to talk about your questions and concerns. The district will continue to update you on new developments on a regular basis. I strongly encourage you to **share your email address with the district during the student registration process** so we can send you this information directly. Otherwise, feel free to check out our social media pages, website, and Gateway app!

Thank you,  
Kristen Smidy, Superintendent

**Gateway Regional School District**  
Return to School Plan  
2021-2022

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## **MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

### **Vaccinations**

The district strongly recommends that all students and staff who are eligible receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Individuals may choose to disclose their vaccination status with the nurse's office along with the required routine vaccinations.

The district is pleased to offer a number of free COVID-19 vaccine clinics in collaboration with the Hilltown Community Health Center at Gateway. Families will receive information as clinics are scheduled.

### **Masking**

All students in grades PreK-12 will be required to wear masks when indoors per DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education which declared exigent circumstances exist that adversely affect the ability of students to attend classes in a safe environment unless additional health and safety measures are put in place through at least October 1, 2021.

Masks must be:

- Clean
- Two ply with ear loops or ties (gaiters, scarves, or bandanas are not acceptable)
- Fitted to to the face and covers the nose and mouth area
- Transparent masks may be the best option for both teachers and students in classes for deaf and hard of hearing students. They may also be useful for teachers and younger students who rely on visual / facial cues.
- Reusable masks/face coverings provided by families should be washed by families daily.

The district is happy to provide masks to students for those who forget them or if masks get soiled during the school day.

By federal public health order, all students in grades PreK through twelve and staff are required to wear masks on school buses. Additionally, all staff and students must wear masks while in school health offices.

Exceptions to mask/face covering requirements must be made for those for whom it is not possible due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health or safety factors. A doctor's note must be submitted to the main office with this request.

Mask breaks should occur throughout the day. Breaks should occur when students can be six feet apart and ideally outside or at least with the windows open.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recommends using progressive discipline for mask noncompliance concerns.

## **COVID-19 Testing**

Gateway Regional School District plans to participate in on-site COVID-19 testing, which is fully funded and staffed by both federal and state grants.

The three types of COVID-19 testing offered are:

- Regular pooled/individual testing
- Symptomatic testing
- Test-and-Stay for close contacts

All testing requires a consent form completed online by families. Please consider permitting your child to participate in this very quick and noninvasive testing.

### ***Regular Pooled Testing***

The purpose of pooled testing is to obtain weekly data regarding the population's COVID-19 status. It is a noninvasive, very fast test that will give the entire community peace of mind that the risk of transmission is low since the majority of staff and students tested negative. If there is a positive case in the school, weekly routine testing will allow us to catch it quickly and take the appropriate steps to contain possible transmission or spread to others.

There are two types of specimen collection-the nasal swab and the saliva sample. Students in grades K-12 may take their own specimen, but may also receive assistance as needed. The nasal swab consists of a student swirling a q-tip in the opening of each nostril for a few seconds and then depositing the q-tip into a test tube. This should be done twice so two samples are submitted each time. These samples will be collected upon arrival at school and it will take less than five minutes for the state-provided certified medical testing coordinator to collect. The saliva sample consists of collecting saliva in a test tube before school begins (so this can be done at home) and depositing the test tube into the collection area before reporting to class.

The state-provided certified medical testing coordinator will then transport the specimen to a lab, and the school will get the results within 18-24 hours. Any pooled test that comes back as positive will trigger the lab to test the individual specimens from that pool to identify the positive sample. This will provide the school and family with rapid results so the student may get the appropriate support to quarantine as needed. All specimens are disposed of immediately after testing.

### ***Symptomatic testing***

Students should not report to school with illness symptoms. Should someone develop illness symptoms during the school day the school will also have on-site BinaxNOW antigen tests available.. These tests are the rapid tests and can be administered by the nursing staff in the health offices . Upon a positive result, the student's family will be notified for additional next steps. If the student tests negative and their symptoms are mild , they may stay at school if they

are feeling well enough. In both cases, the district may recommend following up with the student's pediatrician for a PCR test to be sure of results.

### ***Close Contact Testing (Test-and-Stay Model)***

Students who are deemed as close contacts for someone who tested positive for COVID-19 may still be eligible to attend school if they participate in the Test-and-Stay model, provided that they are asymptomatic and wear a mask at all times, regardless of exemption status. At the start of each day, students will have the opportunity to take a BinaxNOW antigen test. If the test is negative, and the student complies with the other requirements of Test-and-Stay, the student may remain at school. More information about Test-and-Stay is below.

### **Distancing**

At Gateway Regional, we have a large facility that allows us to maintain at least the recommended three feet of distance with our small class sizes. Hallway guides will be placed throughout the buildings to keep the flow of traffic moving during passing time. There will be times that distancing cannot be maintained due to the class activity, and teachers will encourage students to wear masks during this time.

### **Air Quality and Ventilation**

All facilities at Gateway Regional have preventative maintenance performed including new air filters and regular inspections. The air exchange rate in each classroom in every school meets or exceeds the ASHRAE guidelines for schools during the pandemic. Many spaces have over two times the recommended air exchange rate. Air purifiers are placed strategically throughout our facilities to add to our exemplary air quality, including in our health offices and in rooms where the viral load is expected to be greater than normal, such as the cafeteria, gymnasium, and music rooms.

### **Hand washing and sanitizing**

Hand washing is still recommended as a solid mitigation strategy to avoid COVID-19. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol) may be utilized when hand washing is not available. The district will provide opportunities for students to wash their hands throughout the day as well as hand sanitizer to all students and have it available in easily accessible areas throughout the building. A sanitizer consent form will be sent home for your review as part of the beginning-of-school packet.

### **Cleaning**

The district remains committed to ensuring that we continue to maintain a clean space for all to use. Custodial staff will prioritize high touch surfaces and bathrooms each day.

# PROTOCOLS

## **Bus transportation**

All staff and students on the bus, regardless of age, are required to wear masks at all times, even if an exemption is on file per the DESE guidelines. Drivers will be provided extra masks by the school district. Distancing will be maintained as much as possible on buses, but there is no longer a reduced capacity limit. Because of this, windows will be open during operation, unless not possible due to extreme weather conditions.

## **Morning Drop Off**

### *Middle/High School drop off*

Drop off for middle and high school students should occur between 7:00 and 7:25 a.m. in the circle between Littleville and the main campus. Students will be allowed in the building at 7:15.

### *Littleville drop off*

Cars will pull around in front of the high school complex and all students in grades K-6 will enter/exit vehicles at that location. For safety purposes, please do not let children exit the vehicle until the vehicle has pulled up to where staff are assisting with unloading.

K-4 students will be walking over to Littleville on the sidewalks. We will have several staff members positioned along the sidewalks to supervise students. It will be very helpful if you dress your child appropriately or send them with an umbrella on rainy days.

Morning drop-off begins at 8:45am and parent pick-up starts at 3:20pm.

### *Chester drop off*

Cars will pull into the second parking lot entrance along the curb where students will exit the vehicle. For safety purposes, please do not let children exit the vehicle until the vehicle has pulled up to where staff are assisting with unloading.

Morning drop-off begins at 8:45am and parent pick-up starts at 3:15pm.

## **Health Office**

The school health office is available to all students. Anyone entering the health office is required to wear a mask, per the DPH order. Nurses will be able to perform rapid COVID testing for students who don't feel well along with their other exemplary services. It may take a few extra moments for nurses to attend to students' non-emergency needs, as they are required to have full PPE when working with students who are exhibiting COVID-related symptoms.

## **Cafeteria and Lunch**

Breakfast and lunch are free for all students for the duration of the 21-22 school year per the US Department of Agriculture. If eating inside, students are strongly encouraged to sit with the same peer group each day for contact tracing purposes and will have restrictions on their ability to move around the cafeteria during lunchtime. Distancing is encouraged as much as possible. Middle and high school students may have the opportunity to eat outside. Students who are not eating are required to wear masks while waiting in the cafeteria for lunch to conclude.

## **Lockers**

Middle and high school locker use is suspended until further notice. Elementary school lockers will be available at the beginning of the day and end of the day only.

## **Band/Chorus/Music Classes**

The district's music teachers and administration received safety recommendations and will implement specific mitigation measures for these classes. Mitigation strategies will look similar to last year during in person learning in the spring. Expectations will be shared at the start of school.

## **Field Trips**

Field trips will be carefully considered on a case by case basis this year due to the potential increased exposure. Families will be provided with specific information regarding proposed field trips and the risk associated. Even if the school proposes a field trip, depending on the location's availability and shifting guidelines, field trips may need to be postponed or canceled which are outside the district's control. We remain committed to providing students with a rich learning experience, and school staff will work collaboratively with members of the proposed field trip site to ensure safety measures are in place.

## **Extracurricular Activities**

All students who are participating in after school activities will need to comply with the same in-school expectations for safety. Masks will be required for indoor activities and not required outdoors. Additional guidance from the MIAA may be forthcoming regarding safety protocols for sports, which we will share as needed.

## **Visitors**

All visitors will be required to comply with all mitigation strategies outlined by the district including mask wearing. Visitors will be limited to approved meetings and appointments only. Virtual meetings and conferences may occur in lieu of in person meetings.

## **Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and Contact Tracing**

DESE is recommending the following testing and quarantine response protocols.

### ***For individuals who test positive for COVID-19***

- Self-isolation for a minimum of ten days after symptoms onset or after positive PCR or antigen test if asymptomatic
- Return to school only when:
  - Ten day isolation period is complete AND
  - Fever free for 24 hours AND
  - Experienced improvement in other symptoms AND
  - Clearance from Board of Health/Contact Tracer or school health professional before returning to school.

Note that return to school is based on time and symptom resolution.

### ***For asymptomatic close contacts***

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of an individual who tested positive for COVID-19 while indoors for at least 15 minutes or longer during a 24 hour period.

The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts
- Classroom close contacts where both individuals were masked and at least three feet apart
- Bus close contacts where both individuals were masked and windows were open
- Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days and the close contact remains without COVID-19 symptoms

If none of the above exemptions apply, asymptomatic close contacts may follow one of the three protocols below.

#### ***Test and Stay protocol for asymptomatic close contacts--7 day period (recommended)***

- Attend school and take a rapid antigen test in the health office upon arrival each school day. When a negative test is confirmed, the individual may remain in school.
- Wear a mask all day, regardless of exemption status, other than eating and drinking. While eating or drinking, at least three feet of distancing must be maintained.
- Conduct active monitoring to ensure symptoms do not develop for fourteen days.

#### ***Traditional protocol with testing for asymptomatic close contacts***

- Quarantine for seven dates from date of exposure
- Receive a COVID-test on day 5 or later and receive a negative result
- Conduct active monitoring to ensure symptoms do not develop for fourteen days.

#### ***Traditional protocol without testing for asymptomatic close contacts***

- Quarantine for ten dates from date of exposure
- Conduct active monitoring to ensure symptoms do not develop for fourteen days.

### *For symptomatic close contacts*

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of an individual who tested positive for COVID-19 while indoors for at least 15 minutes or longer during a 24 hour period.

There are no exemptions from this protocol based on vaccination status.

#### *Traditional return to school protocol with testing for symptomatic close contacts*

- Isolate until symptoms are no longer present
- Receive a negative PCR test result or a doctor's diagnosis of another illness
- Ensure fever free for 24 hours

#### *Traditional return to school protocol with testing for symptomatic close contacts*

- Isolate for at least ten days from symptom onset **and** until symptoms are no longer present
- Ensure fever free for 24 hours

# REFERENCES

[DESE/DPH Guidance for Districts and Schools from July 30, 2021](#)

[Links to translated guidance](#)

[DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios from August 13, 2021](#)

[DESE COVID-19 Testing Programs for Districts and Schools from August 11, 2021](#)

[Massachusetts DPH COVID Dashboard with weekly data](#)