

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Haywood County Schools – Administrative Guidance for COVID-19 Haywood County, North Carolina – August 10, 2021

This administrative guidance is provided after a review of the Strong Schools Toolkit and associated state orders, conversations with local public health officials and feedback from many parents and members of the community. The administrative guidance is provided in the following categories.

Cohorting/Grouping

Schools are expected to assign seating in classrooms and other regular settings where students stay in one location for an extended period of time. This is important for contact tracing purposes. This should be helpful in identifying close contacts and limiting the spread of COVID-19 at school.

Social Distancing

Schools will utilize social distancing at a minimum of 3 feet whenever practical. This distance is recommended when individuals are masked. This minimal social distancing is especially important when students are stationary in one location for an extended period of time. When practically possible, schools should utilize a minimum of 6 feet of social distancing.

Good Hand Hygiene Routines

Schools will maintain the good hand hygiene routines established during the 2020-21 school year. This includes, but is not limited to, the availability and use of hand sanitizing stations in classrooms and other locations on school campuses.

Reduce or Eliminate Shared Materials and Devices

Schools will work to reduce or eliminate when possible, the use of shared materials and devices. While the risk of environmental spread has been minimal, reducing or eliminating shared use of materials or devices could be beneficial.

Routine Cleaning

Schools will continue routine cleaning especially in high touch areas. While the risk of environmental spread has been minimal, cleaning high touch areas is always important. In addition to routine cleaning, focused cleaning will occur in instances when a positive person is identified to have been on campus. This type of focused cleaning worked well during the 2020-21 school year in helping to prevent the on-campus spread of COVID-19.

Increased Ventilation

Increased ventilation will continue to be practiced at school. During the 2020-21 school year, schools often increase ventilation by opening windows when it seemed safe to do so. Schools also took the opportunity to conduct activities outside when practical. This school year, the school system will be spending Federal COVID Relief Funds to improve air circulation and quality through the purchase and installation of a number of new HVAC units.

Stay-at-Home Promotion and Monitoring

During the 2020-21 school year staff, students and parents were asked to notify the school system when they could answer “yes” to any of the following questions.

1. Have you had “close contact” with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, or has any health department or health care provider been in contact with you and advised you to quarantine or isolate?
2. Since you were last at school/work, have you had COVID-19 symptoms (fever of 100.4, new loss of taste or smell, etc.)?
3. Since you were last at school/work, have you been diagnosed with COVID-19?

People were also asked to provide prompt notification when a household member:

1. Has a confirmed case of COVID-19
2. Has symptoms (fever of 100.4 or higher, new loss of taste or smell, etc.)
3. Is awaiting COVID-19 test results AND is symptomatic.

The notifications are very helpful in significantly reducing the spread of COVID-19 on school campuses. The notifications are required for employees and we ask everyone to continue providing this information to the school system.

In addition to the notifications, the school system will actively promote and monitor situations in which students and staff should stay-at-home. It is very important for people to stay-at-home if they are COVID-19 positive or could likely be COVID-19 positive. We ask people to stay at home and contact a medical provider if they have any of the following symptoms:

1. Fever (temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
2. Sore throat
3. Cough (for people with chronic cough due to allergies or asthma, a change in their cough from their normal baseline)
4. Difficulty breathing (for people with asthma, a change from their baseline breathing)
5. New loss of taste or smell
6. Diarrhea or vomiting
7. New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

Sick Room (COVID Room)

Schools will continue to maintain a room for individuals who are sick. Individuals with any of the symptoms listed above will be expected to wear a mask until they are picked up from school by a parent or guardian.

Masks

In making decisions about wearing masks, students, parents and staff members should be aware that masks and vaccinations are factors in determining close contact and quarantine decisions. Regardless of masking choice, everyone should be treated respectfully regarding their personal decision. Parents who want their children to wear masks should notify their child's school. The school will work to remind students and support the parents' choice.

1. Properly worn masks only reduce the possibility of being a close contact if the positive person was also wearing a mask.
2. Students who develop symptoms at school will be expected to wear a mask until pickup.
3. Masks are required on school busses. Yellow School Buses are state owned and fall under the Federal transportation order for public transportation. The order states that passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems. The School Boards' action to make masks optional did not include buses.
4. Since masking is optional, when a positive case has been identified, it may be necessary for some close contacts to temporarily wear a mask to participate in in-person learning.

Close Contact Definition

Close contacts are determined on a case-by-case basis. The definition of a “close contact” is (1) within 6 feet (2) greater than 15 minutes, consecutively or cumulatively (3) without a properly worn mask. These criterion were established when masking in school was universal. In determining close contacts in an optional mask setting, other factors will have to be considered. These additional factors/questions include, but are not limited to: (1) Who was wearing a mask? (2) what is the vaccine status of those who came in contact with a positive person? (3) proximity to the positive individual? (4) duration of time and type of contact?

Factors Considered in Adjusting School Schedules

During the 2020-21 school year, Haywood County Schools used two primary factors in determining the closure of classrooms or schools due to COVID-19. Last year, two classrooms were temporarily closed and three Mandatory Remote Learning Days were used following the holiday break after New Years Day. These factors were:

1. Uncontrolled on-campus spread of COVID-19
2. The inability to staff classes, schools or programs

Notification of Positive Cases

During the 2020-21 school year, positive cases were posted on a COVID Dashboard located on the school system website. The COVID Dashboard will continue during the 2021-22 school year despite being somewhat misleading. Many people thought the reported cases were positive cases transmitted at school. Cases on the dashboard are known cases that included many students or staff members who were not on campus while positive. In some instances, remote-only students were included on the Dashboard.

Schools are not required to send a mass-notification message. The previous messaging was confusing for some people and was made simultaneously with postings on the Dashboard. Several parents asked to be removed from the mass-notification calls. Parents may call the specific school to check on the grade level of postings on the dashboard. Schools cannot legally provide personal information beyond the grade level.

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