

# MECKLENBURG COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Fall 2021 COVID-19 Operational Guidelines/Plans

*August 30, 2021*

It is the desire of Mecklenburg County Public Schools to maximize in-person learning opportunities while also mitigating the continued spread of COVID-19. It is our intent to provide in-person learning five days per week while also taking prudent steps to keep our students, staff, and community safe. We closely monitor community transmission data, adhere to applicable public health orders, and have flexible operational plans. We recognize it is possible that a COVID-19 surge/outbreak may require all students to engage in virtual learning for temporary periods during the 2021-22 academic year, and we are confident we can do that successfully if necessary.

As of the end of August, 51.8% of the adult population of Mecklenburg County has been fully vaccinated. The vaccine is not yet available for students under age 12 and we are unsure how many students aged 12 or older have received the vaccinations. At the end of the 2020-21 academic year, our records indicated 409 of our employees were fully vaccinated – that is fewer than half of our total number.

Currently, the Delta variant of COVID-19 virus is spreading readily across Virginia and the country. This variant, according to health sources, is more easily transmitted than the original and subsequent strains of the virus that were experienced in this country through 2020-21. Fully vaccinated individuals may become infected with the Delta variant and transmit it to others while being asymptomatic or exhibiting only minimal symptoms. This finding caused the CDC to revise its recommendations the last week of July indicating that all persons, vaccinated and unvaccinated, should wear face coverings when indoors with others.

MCPS closely monitors the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) website to determine the number of new cases, new hospitalizations, and new deaths due to the virus in Mecklenburg County. This site is also used to monitor the community transmission rate for the county. We link this VDH data to the color code system recently adopted by the CDC and VDH to indicate the severity of community transmission.

Indicator	Low Transmission	Moderate Transmission	Substantial Transmission	High Transmission
Total new cases per 100,000 person in the past 7 days (from VDH)	0-9	10-49	50-99	>100

At our highest community transmission rate last academic year, using this scale, our numbers placed us in the ‘Red’ category (Example: our highest 7 day per 100k average hit 67.3 on January 28, 2021; recalculating to this updated measure, the total new cases per 100k in the seven day span of January 22-28, our rate at that time would have been 474.2).

From May 11, 2021 to July 21, Mecklenburg County was in the ‘Blue’ or ‘Yellow’ categories and enjoyed low community transmission rates. Since July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Mecklenburg has seen cases increase sharply. We moved into the ‘Orange’ category the week of July 19. Local transmission has continued to increase. We have now been in the high transmission category ‘Red’ continuously

since July 27. As of August 30, 2021, our community transmission rate using this calculation is now 335.9.

During the 2020-21 academic year, we demonstrated that we could readily shift from in-person to virtual learning and back again if needed. Our 2021-22 academic calendar has four built-in virtual days for student learning this year – planned in part to keep us prepared for any necessary shifts. It is our expectation, however, to shift to fully virtual learning only if absolutely necessary. We want to teach and learn in person, whenever possible.

### **Operational Guidelines, Notes, and Recommendations**

1. We plan for flexibility in operations this year and believe it is appropriate to vary our mitigation strategies according to the transmission rate as reported by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) in their Monday through Friday updates. Our students and employees are able to adjust practices and protocols as the level of transmission may dictate.
2. We have committed to our teachers that they would not have to teach virtually and in-person simultaneously this year.
3. We strongly encourage all employees and students aged 12 and older to be vaccinated against this virus. The three vaccines available have been proven safe and effective against severe cases and even hospitalization, including the Delta variant or its sublineages.
4. We will continue to rely on our nursing staff to serve as trained contact tracers to quarantine individuals or groups. If an outbreak occurs, we would work to contain those individuals, that class, or that school rather than act more broadly across the division.
5. To be prepared to mitigate any level of transmission variance, all students and employees should have properly fitting (covering both nose and mouth simultaneously) double layer cloth or disposable face masks with them or easily accessible at all times. It is recommended that each person have two or more with them and that double layer cloth face coverings are regularly washed and single use disposable masks are not repeatedly worn as that is not their design. MCPS will maintain a supply of disposable face coverings on buses and at schools for those that have a lost, damaged, or improper face covering, but students and employees are expected to provide and maintain their own in general.
6. If MCPS requires all to wear face coverings due to community transmission levels, all must wear face coverings. Students without a face covering will not be transported by MCPS. Students who refuse to wear a properly fitting face covering while at school will be sent to the office of the school nurse to remain until the parent/guardian picks them up – they may not use MCPS transportation without wearing their face-covering. As refusal to properly wear face coverings potentially endangers the individual and others; students may face discipline consequences or re-assignment for refusal to follow established safety guidelines.
7. At all school levels, students will move from class to class. This is what we did last spring in secondary – the nature of the schedules required the students to move. At the elementary level, this is a change from last year. Students will go to specials/content teachers rather than teachers coming to them. For all levels, when a class leaves a room, the teacher will spray disinfectant on desks and the arriving group will wipe them down with paper towels, just as we

did last year.

8. Teachers are to build in time throughout the day for students to remove their face coverings for a brief period of time – take them outside, to a courtyard, etc. – while ensuring proper distancing is in place for any time masks are off. If the mask break is to take place inside, the distance between students should be greater than if they were outside.
9. Students will be moving through cafeteria lines, picking up their breakfast and lunches, and will be masked during that time. When seated to eat, students will be spaced to the greatest extent possible as they will be unmasked while eating.
10. Athletic guidelines (from VHSL): MCPS will look to guidelines developed by the VHSL to identify high or low risk sports and health protocols. Any positive cases will be reported and handled by our school nurses per the protocol on which they have been trained.
11. If/When classes are quarantined but the vaccinated teacher is not (if they are vaccinated, for instance), those teachers will continue to report to the building and perform their instructional duties from the classroom.
12. Students will have assigned seats on school buses. Buses will not be wiped down between loads but will be regularly cleaned.
13. Posts will be made to the division's web page and social media platforms on the afternoon of each school day by 1:00 PM, based upon that day's VDH tracking numbers, to alert all as to what level we will be (Blue/Yellow or Orange/Red) for the following school day. We will announce at the end of each day at school, post on the website, and post on social media the 'color' of the next day. The 'color' will direct the following actions/practices/protocols to guide how students and employees will operate.

**If Mecklenburg County COVID-19 transmission rate is at the 'blue' or 'yellow' risk level:**

- Screening questions will be asked of all students each morning. We will follow our screening and/or quarantine protocols for any potential positives.
- All students riding in MCPS vehicles and MCPS drivers will wear properly fitted face coverings while in MCPS vehicles.
- All students and employees may wear properly fitting face coverings if they choose to do so.
- Athletics, clubs, music, and all organizations may operate normally (practice, games, etc.), with protocols in place to minimize transmission.
- Field trips may take place.
- Visitors will not be allowed to enter the building except those providing professional services; if vaccinated, no face covering required.

**If Mecklenburg County COVID-19 transmission rate is at the 'orange' or 'red' risk levels:**

- Screening questions will be asked of all students each morning. We will follow our screening and/or quarantine protocols for any potential positives.
- All students riding in MCPS vehicles and MCPS drivers will wear properly fitted face coverings while in MCPS vehicles.
- All students and employees will wear properly fitting face coverings when in school buildings or other school property, or when operating school vehicles except when eating or outdoors.

- When eating, students should be spaced greater than three feet apart.
- Secondary school athletics, music, clubs, and other organizations will modify practices/meetings to socially distance and other appropriate measures to prevent transmission of the virus. Suspension of some sports/activities is possible during the time we are in orange or red.
  - Field trips will be suspended other than for athletics.
  - Visitors will not be allowed to enter the building except those providing professional services. Face covering will be required at all times for those that must enter.

**It is possible, depending on state direction or dramatic increase of cases, that Mecklenburg County may shift to fully virtual learning so that:**

- Our schools/buildings will be open for teachers/staff/employees but not for students.
- Employees who come to school/buildings will wear properly fitting face coverings when in proximity to other employees.
- Employees who are able to work from home will do so.
- Schools will operate virtually, students and staff interacting through Canvas and Google Meet.
- MCPS does not anticipate providing wifi hotspots this year to all who need them, just those immediately impacted by a quarantine or shutdown; virtual learning will be expected to take place beginning the third day of a class or school quarantine, with two days of lessons uploaded to their devices prior to leaving school.
- Transportation will not operate.
- Athletics, clubs, organizations, or groups will not practice or compete.