

**Mecklenburg County Public Schools
Fall 2021 Reopening
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
August 31, 2021**

What is different this year from last year?

MCPS is opening to face to face instruction five days a week this year. Our buses will be filled to capacity. Our middle and high schools start and end earlier than our elementary schools.

With COVID-19 cases so high, why are we back in school?

The local COVID-19 transmission rates are as high now in Mecklenburg County as they were last December through February – when we shut down all face to face instruction and went to full remote learning last year. The General Assembly requires schools to provide in-person instruction five days a week this year. We have considerable confidence that properly wearing face coverings will reduce the spread of the disease. We can also quickly contact trace, using our trained school nurses, and quarantine individuals or classes if needed.

Where do you get your COVID-19 cases and transmission rate data?

The Virginia Department of Health. VDH updates their COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, deaths, and community transmission (weekly) data M-F by 10:00 AM. MCPS tracks the daily community transmission data by dividing the sum of the most recent seven days by the population of Mecklenburg County (30,364) and then multiplying that number by 100,000 to give us the indicator number for the table just below. Another factor for the rate of community transmission is the percent positive (PCR only) test results – also found on the VDH website under the community transmission tab.

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

Will MCPS operate differently depending on the level of community transmission?

Yes. Using the VDH community transmission data and its Blue, Yellow, Orange, and Red code system indicating rate of transmission, MCPS has operational guidelines for when we are in the Blue/Yellow categories and other guidelines for when we are in the Orange/Red categories. Here are those general guidelines:

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.

Can we still choose virtual learning?

With COVID-19 cases continuing to rise and some parents who do not wish their student to wear masks at school, we continue to get calls from parents requesting a virtual learning option. We do not have a virtual option for students at this time. There are fewer than 30 students who were approved for virtual learning this year – and they are learning through the Virtual Virginia platform. If a parent does not want their child to attend school in person at this time, they will need to consider homeschooling and perhaps explore virtual learning options through one of the several platforms available to Virginia families.

What will face to face learning look like for elementary students?

Other than wearing face coverings, the school day will be almost normal for students. Daily COVID-19 checks will be made in the morning, students will be socially distanced while eating and unmasked, and many will be eating in their classrooms rather than all in the cafeteria. Students generally move in cohorts – all the same students together – throughout the day and interactions between cohorts will be limited.

What will face to face learning look like for secondary students?

Other than wearing face coverings, the school day will be almost normal for students. Daily COVID-19 checks will be made in the morning, students will be socially distanced while eating and unmasked, and many will be eating in their classrooms rather than all in the cafeteria. Students will move from block to block during the day, but will not have lockers and will be asked to not congregate.

Will students have to wear face coverings all day?

Generally, yes. From the time in the morning when they enter MCPS transportation services until they exit MCPS transportation services in the afternoon, or, if transported by parent/guardian, from the time the student enters until they leave the building, students are expected to wear properly fitting face coverings over both their nose and mouth. Teachers have been instructed to

build in mask-free time during the day – to walk outside, for instance – for students to give them breaks from the mask. Students will not wear face coverings while they eat breakfast and lunch, but they are to be socially distanced during that time. Finally, students may remove their masks during sports practice or exercise outside.

Doesn't wearing masks all day cause all sorts of problems for students?

Absolutely not. Despite many claims circulating otherwise, wearing face coverings all day does not impair the health of children or adults. Wearing face coverings protects self and others and, for students under twelve, is the only means of protection from the virus that we have available to us in school. Masks are not perfect; you can still get the virus wearing a mask, they may be uncomfortable, they muffle speech, and they do need to be kept in good order and always cover both nose and mouth to be effective.

What happens if a student does not wear a mask?

That is not an option when we are in the orange or red category, by our own protocols, or until the governor lifts the mandate that all in schools must wear a mask. Drivers will not permit unmasked students to ride in MCPS transportation vehicles. School personnel will not allow unmasked students to enter the school - parents will have to pick them up. Drivers and school personnel have masks to give to students who forget, lose, or damage their mask.

Does Mecklenburg County Public Schools plan to require vaccinations of employees and students?

Vaccinations are preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and deaths. We encourage all employees and students aged twelve and over to be vaccinated, but we do not require evidence of vaccination.

How are athletics and field trips affected?

When we are in the blue or yellow categories, field trips and athletics may take place with minimal, if any, restrictions. When we are in the orange or red categories, field trips are not allowed. Athletics, however, may continue but must follow the mitigation strategies and best practices shared by the VHSL.

What happens when a positive case is reported in a school?

We are fortunate to have all of our school nurses and our nurse supervisor trained as contact tracers. When a positive case is reported, they will immediately follow up with the individual and work through the process to determine if others must be quarantined. If a positive case is found to be in a school, the principal will send a general message to their school community alerting them to the fact and letting them know that we are following our contact tracing and quarantine protocols. Individuals, classes, or teams, or larger groups may be quarantined.

Will MCPS shut down schools due to COVID-19?

MCPS does not anticipate a situation, even with high community transmission rates, where we would shut down the entire division this year. Individual schools, however, may be forced to shut down for a period of time by the Health Department or administratively due to either a high case rate or the absence of too many key personnel to operate the school.

How will students learn if they are out of school?

We learned how to learn remotely last year – and we can do it well. We have put protocols in place for learning to continue in the case of individual quarantine, class quarantine, or even the shutdown of an entire school. All students will download two days of appropriate school work prior to leaving school for the period of quarantine or closure (students should always have their Chromebooks at school with them). We keep track of students who do not have home internet access. Students without home internet access will need to pick up hotspots from the school in the next two days following quarantine or shutdown – the device will be temporarily activated and checked out to them. On the third day out of school, all students will join their teachers synchronously virtually via their school issued device and instruction will continue until the class or school returns to in-person learning. Teachers are preparing for this contingency.