



July 16, 2021

Columbia Public Schools District, Educators, and Families,

We are the Columbia Missouri National Education Association (CMNEA), an organization of Columbia Public Schools (CPS) educators who believe in great public schools for every child. As always, we are committed to keeping every student, family, teacher, and staff member safe, and providing our Columbia students with the best education possible.

In preparation for this fall, amidst a continuing global pandemic, CMNEA reconvened our COVID Advisory Committee to make updated recommendations for conducting in-person school, considering the health and safety of students, school personnel, and their families. Last year's [2020-2021 CMNEA COVID Recommendations](#) included many important details, but these recommendations for the 2021-2022 school year contain actionable suggestions based on the experiences gained last year. We want to maintain, and improve where needed, the safety measures in place for our scholars as well as the teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Despite all our fervent desire to have a normal school year, the pandemic is not over yet. We cannot ignore the risk that continues to test our steadfastness to safety measures because we wish for normal and simple.

At this time, Columbia COVID-19 case numbers are rising sharply; in fact, summer school single day infection numbers are approaching the numbers from January 2021. These increases are primarily driven by the Delta variant which has a significantly higher transmission rate than previous variants and is showing some evidence of vaccine breakthrough. Yet, full vaccination rates in the Columbia Public Schools catchment area have not reached 70%. Surrounding communities have even lower rates, and in September we will have an influx of college students who will not be required to be vaccinated as a condition of their return. Current information suggests that vaccinated individuals can transmit the Delta variant to unvaccinated individuals, and our youngest scholars are not yet eligible for vaccination. In light of this overwhelming evidence, we request that CPS require masks for all individuals in CPS buildings until all students can be fully vaccinated.

We thank the dedicated educators who served on our committee and devoted hours to this work. We hope the District, educators, and families will thoughtfully consider our recommendations as we work together to keep everyone in our community safe and continue to provide our scholars with an outstanding education.

Sincerely,

CMNEA COVID Advisory Committee

I. Recommendations for Safe In-seat Instruction

A. Masks

1. Until preK-5 students are eligible for the vaccines, have received their doses and surpassed the 2 week waiting period to become fully vaccinated, all people in any CPS building should be required to wear masks that fit the face, covering nose and mouth.
2. Unvaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks that fit the face, covering nose and mouth, until further notice, even after children <12 years old have been vaccinated.
3. Availability of masks:
 - a. Two shall be provided by the District for all new school personnel. (See-through masks are a priority for pre-K- 2nd grade, ELL, speech pathologists, World language and teachers/paras of the hearing impaired.)
 - b. Disposable masks should be available for anyone who enters a CPS building without one.

B. Mask compliance

1. The District should communicate a clear district wide plan regarding how administrators will support educators in enforcing mask requirements.
2. Enforcement should utilize non-punitive, mental health sensitive, and culturally relevant measures.
 - a. Restorative conversations (not punitive actions) should be the first action taken with non-compliant individuals.
 - b. Provide positive feedback for compliance and efforts towards compliance.
3. Building administrators and educators should work to create age-appropriate guidelines for mask breaks for students and staff.
4. Mask exemptions
 - a. Parents/Guardians must provide documentation to request an exemption from wearing a mask.
 - b. Building administration should be provided with a rubric for evaluating mask exemption requests.

C. Physical Environment

1. As much as possible, appropriate seating should be provided in every classroom that will maximize social distancing and front faced seating or provide stable classroom groupings.
2. Create, maintain, and keep dated records of all seating charts (for contact tracing purposes).
3. Adjustments to school lunch shifts (and recess shifts, where appropriate) should be made and shared to reduce group sizes for social distancing purposes.
 - a. Avoid having elementary students eat in classrooms as it puts excessive responsibility on classroom teachers for supervision and clean up.
 - b. Hire and incentivize supervisory positions during class movements, lunches and recess.
4. In-person before and after school activities should follow COVID protocols instituted during the 20-21 school year to reduce the chance of transmission among teammates.
 - a. Where feasible, replace club activities with online meetings or provide for appropriate social distancing.
 - b. Mask use must be enforced inside CPS buildings.

II. Recommendations for Daily Operations

A. In the schools

1. Create a culture that promotes community and taking care of each other.
2. Teach and model proper mask wearing, mask-cleaning, and hygiene.
3. Hand sanitizer and facial tissues should be clearly visible and easily accessible for

student use in each classroom. *These should be provided by the District and not purchased by staff, nor paid for out of school instructional budgets.*

4. Classrooms with sinks should have soap and paper towels clearly visible and easily accessible for student use. *These should be provided by the District and not purchased by staff, nor paid for out of school instructional budgets.*
- B. Staff time requirements
1. Duty-free lunch-- A reasonable amount of space(s) should be provided to accommodate the 25 minute duty free lunch for all staff.
 2. Altered lunch schedules (i.e. lunches in classrooms) require supervision of students so staff may have a duty-free lunch.
 3. Contractual allotments of conference/plan times and collaboration must be maintained.
 4. Hazard pay stipends must be provided if duty free lunch or plan times cannot be honored.
- C. Pathway to Recovery
1. Hire additional Instructional Aides (IAs) or teachers to decrease student: teacher/adult ratio to support just-in-time small group accelerated learning.
 2. Provide specific and timely PD to train Instructional Aides in small-group instruction.
 3. Provide collaboration time for teachers and IAs to allow vertical teaming and coordination of student services.
 4. Adjust district expectations for teacher pacing of curriculum. Allow and encourage teacher autonomy in classroom decisions that permit teachers to meet students where they are.
 5. Hold off on new initiatives: SRG, new grade cards, new reading curricula.
 6. Advocate for the reduction in number and/or frequency of standardized testing.
 7. Hire additional counselors, social workers and home-school communicators.
 8. Increase wrap-around services to support families.
 - a. Publicize organizations like Job Point and United Way for their services.
 - b. Reach out through Partners in Education and the Chamber of Commerce to encourage private company incentives for vaccination.
 9. Promote the fact that our community's businesses have a vested interest in a healthy workforce and should support workers getting vaccinated with time off for vaccination and recovery.

III. Recommendations for Communication

- A. All messaging needs to focus on striving to keep schools open through our collective efforts. (Masks, hygiene, staying home when sick, social distancing, daily checks, etc.)
- B. Share the specific criteria for changing learning modes, district wide by August 15.
- C. The District should be transparent and timely about positive cases among students and staff.
- D. Place the COVID dashboard on the District Home Page, easily accessible to all stakeholders
1. Data should include case numbers/10,000, 14 day rate (as before)
 2. Data should include cases among students and staff (as before)
 3. Data should include sub fill rates
 4. Data should include teacher/staff/student vaccination rates (not disaggregated by building)
- E. Advocacy & Support
1. CMNEA should work closely with District administration and stay up to date on District decisions related to COVID-19 and variants.
 2. CMNEA should maintain the COVID Advisory Committee to make and revise recommendations as needed.
 3. CMNEA should seek ongoing input from members to relay their voice in District decisions related to COVID-19 and variants.
 4. CMNEA should update the District on member concerns and recommendations related to COVID-19 and variants.

III. Recommendations Regarding Illness

A. Family responsibilities

1. Families should keep children home from school who feel ill or exhibit symptoms.
2. Families should screen each student for symptoms at home, prior to coming to school, and should be provided with the district assessment tool.
3. Families should notify their school if their student tests positive for COVID-19 or is isolating because of exposure.
4. Families should have plans in place for care and supervision if their student(s) need to be isolated. The District and/or community partners should assist in providing care/supervision.

B. Illness among students/staff

1. Student Illness

- a. Students who report symptoms should be removed from class, isolated, evaluated and sent home if warranted.
- b. A dedicated, socially distant waiting area for symptomatic students should be available in every building (not the nurses' office which needs to remain clear, safe and available for other medical needs).
- c. Staff should discretely notify administration if a student exhibits COVID-19 symptoms but does not self-report. Students should then be removed from class, isolated, evaluated and sent home if warranted.
- d. Student return to school should follow the return-to-school protocol established by the District, revised July 2021.
- e. Online or traditional lessons should be available for quarantined students. There should be no attendance requirement nor zooming into class expectation. *With masking, close contacts may not need to quarantine for 10 days, which will reduce online lesson load for teachers [new District guidelines, July 2021].*

2. Staff Illness

- a. Staff who report symptoms should be sent home.
- b. Reasonable efforts should be made to allow quarantined employees to work from home.
- c. Their return to school should follow return-to-school protocols established by the District.
- d. The District should reinstate the COVID leave that expired June 30 so staff impacted by quarantines do not have to use accumulated sick time.

C. Testing

1. School personnel directly exposed to COVID-19 or demonstrating COVID symptoms should receive free antigen testing.
2. School-based testing sites should be reopened to assure testing access for all students and school personnel.
3. Anyone who tested positive for COVID-19 antigens should be allowed to return to school after 14 days of quarantine and being symptom-free.
4. Close contacts/ those quarantined should follow return-to-school protocols established by the District, revised July 2021.

IV. Questions for the District

- According to the health department, what is the approximate percentage of secondary students fully vaccinated?
- Can parents and >12 years old students be vaccinated at certain school-based sites as early as possible, providing several opportunities (buildings, days of week, times)?