

GCPS Opening Plan – 2021-22 SY

Giles County Public Schools (GCPS) will be resuming in-person instruction on August 23, 2021 under as normal of circumstances as possible. The following information will help guide the return to school for our students and staff.

On Thursday, August 5th, Governor Northam held a press conference where he referenced Senate Bill 1303, legislation that was passed by the General Assembly during their session this year. Senate Bill 1303 requires that each School Board offer in-person instruction and adhere, to the maximum extent practicable, the current mitigation measures provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Even though we received guidance on July 21, 2021 from DOE that clearly stated they supported school divisions in making decisions on masking and other prevention measures, DOE sent a memo out on Aug. 5th, that reiterated the comments made by the Governor and subsequently amended their official guidance. The most recent update from the CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all students, staff, teachers, and visitors to K -12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

In addition, the Department of Labor and Industry has proposed amendments that will require the following: Employers shall provide and require employees that are not fully vaccinated, and otherwise at-risk employees (because of a prior transplant or other medical condition), to wear face coverings or surgical masks while indoors, unless their work task requires a respirator or other PPE. Such employees shall wear a face covering or surgical mask that covers the nose and mouth to contain the wearer's respiratory droplets and help protect others and potentially themselves.

Based on this information, as well as other correspondence with our local health department, the Giles County School Board approved that GCPS will start school on August 23rd under **Phase II**, requiring masks for all students and staff while indoors, as well as the other strategies listed.

We will continue to operate under Phase II and will continue to evaluate data with our local health department to determine if/when it is appropriate to make any changes to our mitigation plan.

Phase I:

- Masks are required on school transportation for all students (PreK-12) and staff regardless of vaccination status per federal guidelines.
- Masks for **students** within the school building are recommended for all, but are optional based on parental choice. Parents who want their child to wear a mask within the school building will need to communicate that with their child's school. If a child refuses to wear a mask while in the school, schools will notify the parents.
- Masks for **staff members** within the school building are recommended for all, but are optional for vaccinated staff and required for all others.

- Continue frequent and correct hand washing and/or hand sanitizing.
- Physical distancing of three to six feet will be done to the greatest extent possible.
- Regular cleaning schedules will be continued throughout the school day.
- If someone is sick (e.g. experiencing any of these symptoms – fever of 100 degrees or more, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, headache, cough, nausea, loss of smell and/or taste, congestion, difficulty breathing, diarrhea, chest pain, or any other symptoms associated with COVID-19 they need to stay home until symptom-free for 24 hours.
- Quarantine & Close Contact – Individuals found to be within close contact of any positive case following CDC and VDH guidelines (e.g. – within 6 ft. for a total of 15 minutes or more within 24 hours) will be utilized to determine the need to quarantine. Additionally, there is an exception to close contact for K – 12 settings for case investigation and contact tracing. In indoor K – 12 settings, a student who is within 3 to 6 ft. of an infected student is not considered a close contact as long as both students are wearing masks and the school has other mitigation strategies in place. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in indoor K – 12 settings.
- School visitors will be limited within the schools by appointment and will be required to wear masks when entering the school building. Visitors will not be allowed during lunches.
- Isolation rooms will be maintained by each school.

Phase II:

(Mitigation strategies from Phase I will be continued with the following changes):

- Masks are required on school transportation for all students (PreK-12) and staff regardless of vaccination status per federal guidelines.
- (UPDATED) - Masks for **students** will be required within the school building for all.
- (UPDATED) - Masks for **staff members** within the school building will be required for all.
- (UPDATED) – All **students** and **vaccinated staff** can indicate to their school that they have a medical or religious exemption to this masking requirement under Phase II. Individuals do not need to provide verification from a doctor or clergyman for this exemption. The attached document (Attachment A) will need to be provided to school administration to document this requested exemption.
- Physical distancing of three to six feet will be done to the greatest extent possible.
- Regular cleaning schedules will be continued throughout the school day, with additional measures added.
- School visitors will be limited within the schools by appointment and will be required to wear masks when entering the school building. Visitors will not be allowed during lunches
- Temperature screenings will be conducted as students and staff arrive to the facility.

Phase III:

(Mitigation strategies from Phase I and II will be continued with the following changes):

- Masks are required on school transportation for all students (PreK-12) and staff regardless of vaccination status per federal guidelines and number of students on transportation will be limited.
- Masks for **students** within the school building are required for all.
- Masks for **staff members** within the school building are required for all.
- Physical distancing of three to six feet will be maintained.
- Regular cleaning schedules will be continued throughout the school day, with additional measures added to ensure high touch areas are cleaned in between classes.
- No visitors will be allowed within the school building.
- Temperature screenings will be conducted as students and staff arrive to the facility.
- Isolation rooms will be maintained by each school.
- Periods of remote learning may be necessary to limit exposure and enhance learning.

Additional Information

- Please keep in mind that mitigation strategies may move from one Phase to another to meet safety and/or instructional needs
- COVID screening testing will be investigated and may be offered for students and staff members depending on prevalence within the schools
- Masks may be worn if individuals want to continue this practice (schools will have masks available)
- Updates to Athletics, Extracurricular activities, and other school activities will be provided when necessary
- Schools are encouraged to use outdoor spaces whenever possible, because masks are not necessary
- Again, masks will be required on school buses and other forms of transportation, regardless of vaccination status, for all students (PreK – 12) and staff per federal guidelines

Again, GCPS will operate under a three Phased approach for the 2021-22 school year. We will continue to monitor the health metrics and health recommendations from CDC, VDH, and DOE. We will also continue to work with our VDH and our local health department to evaluate situations that may arise and any operational changes that may need to be made due to increased COVID-19 cases within our schools and school division. A transition from one Phase to another may be necessary based on Federal or State requirements or based on our community and/or school COVID-19 data. GCPS continues to encourage those that are eligible to do so, to get the COVID-19 vaccination.

ATTACHMENT A:

Under Phase II of the Giles County Public Schools Opening School plan, I am indicating by signing below that I have a medical and/or religious exemption to the mandate of wearing a face covering while inside the school building. Please sign and complete this form and return it to your school administration.

_____Medical Exemption

_____Religious Exemption

Parent/Guardian Signature

Child's Names

School Name

Employees Signature