



Meridian Community Unit School District 223

Phone: (815) 645-2230

www.meridian223.org

Meridian CUSD 223



MERIDIAN
SCHOOL DISTRICT #223

**Superintendent Recommendation for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction
to Ensure Continuity of Services**

August 2021



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Meridian Parents,

Since Governor Pritzker's Executive Order on Wednesday mandated masks in school for all individuals, **all** county school leaders and school board members have been working diligently in an attempt to adapt our previous plans, communicate unwelcome news to our communities, and to prepare for the upcoming school year. What has become clear, is that we are all struggling with the same reality and we wanted to share consistent information with everyone across the county. Therefore, we decided to collaborate and create a consistent message to share with all Ogle County communities.

In our plan you will find many details in which all districts will need to enforce in the coming year. While this is not what any of us wanted to do, we implore our communities to rally together so that we can work together to provide continuous in-person educational opportunities to our students.

We also thought it prudent to note that we are aware of potential protests and demonstrations speaking out against the statewide mandate and our districts' decision to follow the Executive Order. Our hope is that while everyone has a right to protest decisions that they disagree with, we ask you to please allow us to operate a school environment that is conducive to learning. To clarify, anyone without an agreed upon exemption (as described below) who chooses not to wear a mask will not be permitted into our buildings or learning environments.

We desperately want the opportunity to educate your students again. While every single county district was strongly considering OR had already recommended a mask-optional approach, we now find ourselves in this difficult position. We ask you for support so that we can get back to our primary purpose of educating your student.

Again, as district leaders throughout the county, we appreciate your patience and support. We have the opportunity to make the best of a situation we all wish we were not in, but to do so we need your support.

Thank you,

Ogle County Superintendents



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INFORMATION IN FAQ FORMAT (additional ISBE FAQs available [here](#))

- 1) Will my student be excluded from the learning environment if they refuse to wear a mask?**
 - a) Yes. All students must wear a mask in order to remain in the learning environment.
- 2) Will my child be disciplined if they refuse to wear a mask?**
 - a) Potentially. The goal is to have a student return to the learning environment. Repeated refusal to wear a mask, may lead to student discipline for either a dress code violation or insubordination.
- 3) Will I be told to leave my child's school if I do not wear a mask at school events?**
 - a) Yes. All school-related events are mask-mandatory events until further notice as a result of the Governor's Executive Order.
- 4) Will the district refuse to pick my student up on the bus if they will not wear a mask?**
 - a) Potentially. Our hope is that all students will wear a mask on our buses, if they refuse we may not allow the student on our buses. If a student has forgotten their mask, we will provide one for them.
- 5) Will Meridian CUSD offer a fully remote option for the 2021-2022 school year?**
 - a) No. The district will offer a less-intensive version of remote learning for students who are forced to quarantine. Current ISBE regulations WILL NOT allow for a district to offer a fully remote program at this time. The focus is on getting as many students back into the school environment as possible.
- 6) Will the school test my student for COVID if they have symptoms?**
 - a) Students with signed parental consent waivers are the ONLY students who will have COVID tests performed on them at school.



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7) Will families be required to continue to daily self-check their child(ren) for symptoms?

- a) Yes. But at this time, Meridian CUSD will not require the daily reporting form that was in place last year. Even so, let's continue to be strict in keeping sick students home – this is the single most important part of our plan. We need everyone's cooperation and thank you in advance for your support!

8) What about sports for the 2021-2022 school year?

- a) The IHSA intends to conduct full sports seasons with championship series. All indoor sports will have masked athletes, coaches, and spectators

9) Will MCUSD contact trace during the 2021-2022 school year?

- a) Contact tracing will follow the same protocols as last year. However, as noted earlier, a mask-mandatory environment may lead to significantly less quarantined students as a result of the shift in CDC guidance.

10) Will Meridian CUSD 223 require or track COVID-19 vaccination status?

- a) At this time, the district will NOT require vaccination status be shared, but will likely need to know the vaccination status of students and staff to ensure compliance with quarantine procedures.

11) What should I expect regarding lunch?

- a) We will do our best to have 3 to 6 feet of social distancing during lunch periods. Additionally, as a result of the USDA waiver ANY student will be able to eat the main meal free throughout the school year. A la carte items will still be available, but they will need to be purchased.

12) What about cleaning and hygiene protocols?

- a) We will continue with nightly cleanings using approved and effective products. We also will continue to maintain our hand sanitizing stations throughout the campus and encourage regular handwashing. Good hygiene practices will be a regular topic of conversation with our students.



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Maintaining the Health and Safety of Students, Educators, and Other Staff

In accordance with the Illinois State Superintendent of Schools July 9, 2021 declaration, all Meridian CUSD #223 schools will be open fully for in-person learning for all student attendance days for the 2021-22 school year. Remote instruction will only be made available for quarantined students with specific exceptions only as created through the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education.

You will note that throughout the plan we attempt to accomplish the following:

- Adhere to the guidelines provided to limit the risk of exposure for students and staff
- Adhere to the guidelines provided to limit the risk of liability and financial loss as a result of not following the state guidance
- WHILE DOING THE ABOVE, attempt to provide a school year that progressively moves closer to what we remember as 'normal school.'

MOST RECENT SCHOOL PLAN BASED ON ISBE GUIDANCE

1. Mask Use

Pursuant to Governor Pritzker's [Executive Order 2021- 18](#), issued on August 4, 2021, all individuals, including students, staff, and visitors **must** wear a face covering inside Illinois school buildings, unless an individual cannot wear a mask or cannot safely wear a mask due to a documented medical condition. The District will fully implement this mandate for all staff, students, and visitors at the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

In addition, pursuant to ISBE guidance, updated on August 9, 2021, all persons, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a face mask at all times when in transit to and from school via group conveyance (e.g., school buses), unless a specific exemption applies. Per ISBE, this is in accordance with the CDC Order, in effect as of February 1, 2021, which requires "the wearing of masks by people on public transportation conveyances or on the premises of transportation hubs to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19."

As such, all students and adults must be masked while in all school buildings and for all school activities, which includes but is not limited to, after-school activities, such as Open House and Meet the Teacher Nights, and indoor sports. Additionally, this masking requirement applies to all individuals, including students, riding on school buses. This will mean that your



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student **must** be wearing a mask when entering a bus or wear a mask provided to them to ride the bus to school.

All staff members have been directed by District Administration to enforce the Governor's mask mandate.

For additional information on face masks requirements, click to see [ISBE's guidance](#) for more details.

EXEMPTIONS

Please note Governor Pritzker, ISBE, and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) permit limited medical exemptions to this mask requirement for students who cannot wear a mask or who cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If your child is unable to wear a mask due to a medical condition, please notify your building administrator or school nurse to request a face covering exemption form. Please note, even with a medical exemption, a student would still need to adhere to other mitigation measures, such as strict social distancing and/or use of a face shield.

CONSEQUENCES

The sincere hope of the District is that we have all students enjoying in-person learning this year. If any District student refuses to wear a face covering in accordance with the Governor's August 4, 2021, mandate, the District will follow Board of Education Policy 7:190, *Student Behavior*, and apply behavioral interventions progressively to support student compliance with the state mandate. As such, refusal to wear a mask will lead to the student's removal from the learning environment.

The following steps may be taken if a student refuses to wear a mask. At each step, the student will be asked to wear a mask and if s/he complies, s/he may return to the educational environment immediately:

- Request to wear a mask by any staff member
- Offered a mask by any staff member
- Sent to the office and asked to wear a mask by building administration or office personnel
- Contact parent for support/request student to wear mask and notification of situation
- Removed from the office to any one of the following locations:
 - Isolation tent
 - Supervised outdoor area



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- In-school suspension area

Students refusing to wear a mask may receive additional disciplinary actions due to continued violations of the District's policies and rules pursuant to Board Policy 7:190. Additionally, students refusing to wear a mask are **not** entitled to remote learning instruction, but will have an opportunity to make up their work if they are excluded from school until they comply with school rules.

The District is committed to providing safe in-person instruction to its students during the 2021-2022 school year. In order to prioritize in-person instruction for all students, we must work together to follow both state and federal guidance on reopening our buildings for our students and staff.

2. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, should stay home and contact their healthcare provider for testing and care. **Let us be clear, when in doubt – please stay home if you have any symptoms of COVID-19.**

Students and staff who are fully vaccinated with no COVID-19-like symptoms do not need to quarantine or be restricted from school or extracurricular activities. CDC recommends that fully vaccinated individuals test three to five days after a close contact exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

Students who are quarantined as a result of COVID-19 will receive remote learning services. However, remote learning services WILL NOT consist of five hours of synchronous instruction as during the previous school year. **REMOTE LEARNING EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES ARE CONTAINED IN A SUBSEQUENT SECTION**

Following quarantine, students and staff returning from illness related to COVID-19 are to call to check in with the school's health care professional.

QUARANTINE LENGTHS

The quarantine process is significantly changed from last year. First, the definition of who is a close contact has shifted. The language from the guidance is below.

Only classroom contacts within 3 feet require quarantine as long as both the case and the contact were consistently masked. If they were not consistently masked, then close contacts are classroom students who were within 6 feet of the infected student for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.



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Second, the duration of quarantine has also been modified. The description of quarantine options for unvaccinated individuals is below. Vaccinated individuals deemed close contacts that remain asymptomatic will need not quarantine.

In concert with the Ogle County Health Department we will determine the length of quarantine. As a point of clarification, if Meridian personnel and the Ogle County Health Department do not agree on which option for quarantine is appropriate, the Ogle County Health Department will make the decision.

Option 1: Quarantine at home for 14 calendar days. Date of last exposure is considered day 0.

Option 2: Quarantine for 10 calendar days after the close contact's last exposure to the COVID-19 case. Date of last exposure is considered day 0. The individual may end quarantine after day 10 if no symptoms of COVID-19 developed during daily monitoring. SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing is recommended and **may be required** by the local health department. The individual must maintain physical distancing and masking at all times when returning to school; for classrooms where masking is strictly adhered to, physical distance of 3 to 6 feet is acceptable for return.

Option 3: Quarantine period is for seven calendar days after the last exposure if no symptoms developed during daily monitoring AND the individual has a negative SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic test (PCR) that was collected within 48 hours of exposure day 7 (starting on day 6 or after).

Option 4: Test to Stay Strategy, as has been documented by CDC, if schools test close contacts, as defined above, on day 1, 3, 5, and 7 seven from date of exposure by a PCR or rapid antigen or molecular emergency use authorization (EUA)-approved test, close contacts are permitted to remain in the classroom as long as the results are negative. (See IDPH's Interim Guidance on Testing for COVID-19 in Community Settings and Schools for specific details on testing in schools.)

TEST TO STAY PROGRAM

Students are only eligible for the test to stay program if:

- *Students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks and the school requires universal indoor masking for all individuals (age 2 and older), regardless of vaccination status, as recommended by the CDC.*
- *Students agree to on-site testing*
- *The exposure happened outside of their household*



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Students engaged in Test to Stay after an exposure may participate in extracurricular activities. However, local health departments have the authority to order a classroom-only Test to Stay protocol after assessing the risk of an individual situation.

Local health departments have the authority to assess high-risk exposures and order a traditional quarantine without the option for Test to Stay.

3. Physical Distancing

To the extent possible within school and classroom structures so as not exclude students from full day in-person learning, school staff are to help students commit to physical distancing as much as possible by:

- o Arranging furniture, play spaces and naptime materials to model and reinforce physical distancing of at least 3 feet;
- o Providing assigned seating for students and encourage students to remain in these seats to the greatest extent possible; and
- o Developing marked paths of travel in classrooms and corridors.
- o Increased distance and mitigation should be considered for unvaccinated individuals.

School staff will maximize physical distance as much as possible when moving through food service lines and while eating indoors. Along with the cafeteria, additional spaces for mealtime seating will be utilized when available and feasible (e.g., weather permitting). Students and staff who are fully vaccinated do not need to distance while eating.

Physical distancing measures are to be done in an equitable manner that does not perpetuate academic, racial, or other tracking (e.g., separating people into fully vaccinated and non-fully vaccinated cohorts).

4. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

School staff will monitor and reinforce frequent handwashing and respiratory etiquette by

- o Continuing to teach handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- o Assisting young children with handwashing;
- o Reminding everyone in the facility to wash hands frequently;



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- o Using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (for teachers, staff, and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer) when hand washing is not possible;
- o Continuing to teach respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes); and
- o Providing adequate handwashing and hand sanitizing supplies that are safely stored (up, away, and out of sight of young children and used only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age).

5. Facility and Transportation Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation

School custodial staff and transportation staff will continue to clean surfaces daily. To further reduce the risk of spreading infection, these staff will also use disinfectants on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 “List N” to disinfect spaces occupied by someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours.

Maintenance staff will continue to regularly replace school ventilation system filters by using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters. Although regular tests indicate a high quality of indoor air in our schools, continued improvement of ventilation systems are always being considered.

When possible, staff will open doors and windows, use child-safe fans, and have activities, classes, or lunches outdoors when circumstances allow.

When it does not pose a safety risk, transportation staff will keep vehicle windows open at least a few inches to improve air circulation.

6. Screening /Testing

As a result of working with the Ogle County Health Department, all districts will have access to on-site rapid COVID testing. You have either received a consent form through your registration process or will be receiving one from your district to allow the district to test your student. The hope is that this allows for more students to remain in the learning environment throughout the school year. This testing process is optional.

When a student is symptomatic, the district will provide a BinaxNow test with parent consent. ([Consent form](#)) Additionally, if community transmission is at moderate or substantial levels (as defined subsequently in this document), the district MAY consider mass screening as a mitigation measure to ensure continuity of learning. In addition, at any level of community transmission, any student or staff member who has not been fully vaccinated can request COVID-19 screening testing by contacting the school's health care professional.



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7. Promoting Vaccination

In conjunction with the Ogle County Health Department, a COVID-19 vaccine clinic was made available to anyone in our area 12 years of age and older during the 2020-2021 school-year. Meridian CUSD #223 has also promoted vaccination opportunities via all-district email and via various social media channels throughout the summer. If demand arises, the district will work with local health agencies to bring forward more opportunities for vaccination.

Respectful of peoples' varying levels of vaccine confidence, those who want to get vaccinated against COVID-19 can visit vaccines.gov to find out where they can get vaccinated in our area. In addition, Meridian CUSD #223 Health Services staff will work to help coordinate vaccine information for anyone in need of support.

8. Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs

Parents of students who need accommodations, modifications, or assistance related to COVID-19 safety protocols, disabilities, underlying medical conditions, or weakened immune systems should contact their student's case manager to discuss the need(s).

Staff members who need accommodations, modifications, or assistance related to COVID-19 safety protocols, disabilities, underlying medical conditions, weakened immune systems, or a sincerely held religious belief or practice (covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) should contact their school's principal AND the District's Human Resource Manager to discuss the need(s). Staff members with weakened immune systems are advised to contact their healthcare professional about the need for continued personal protective measures after vaccination.

9. Visitors

Visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations with people who are not fully vaccinated are discouraged from visiting schools when students are present. If visitors or volunteers who are not fully vaccinated are present, additional mitigation strategies may be mandated. All visitors must be masked when inside of Meridian CUSD 223 facilities.

10. Collaboration with Public Health Officials

District officials have consulted with the local health officials and CDC guidance throughout the past 16 months to help inform the creation of this plan. District officials will continue to collaborate and consult with the Ogle County Health Department and have submitted this recommendation for formal review by our local health officials. Throughout the pandemic, the Ogle County Health Department has been an invaluable resource to Meridian CUSD 223 on



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various logistics and decision-making including, but not limited to, school health and safety protocols, screening and testing, contact tracing, vaccine clinics, and emergency school closings, and we anticipate this relationship continuing in the future.

11. Plan Review

Through September 30, 2023, this plan will be reviewed no less frequently than every six months and revised as appropriate after seeking and considering public input. Revisions will address the most recently updated safety recommendations by the CDC, provided in an alternative format accessible to parents who are individuals with a disability as defined by the ADA, and made publicly available on the district's website.

12. Remote Learning Expectations

As of the writing of this plan we are expecting very few quarantine situations due to the quarantine guidelines for universally masked classrooms. We will stay committed and vigilant to doing everything we can to support our learners regardless of circumstance. In the coming weeks, more detail on the specific approach to remote learning will be shared by each principal as we have more clarity.

Per Illinois State Board of Education guidelines, remote learning is to be offered ONLY for students who are placed into quarantine. This means that students will NOT have the option to remote learn by choice this year. Additionally, remote learning for quarantined students will look different from district to district but WILL NOT have five hours of synchronous instruction for students in most cases.

13. Self-Certification

Districts are not mandated to use a self-certification process for this year. However, the firm expectation is that parents keep their students home and immediately notify the school district if their student is exhibiting any of the following symptoms.

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19 and should refrain from attending school or extracurricular activities: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.