

August, 2021 Dear Team BCPS,

As we face the many challenges of these unprecedented times, we hope that you and your loved ones are healthy and safe. The COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for everyone, and we recognize some of our neighbors have been disproportionately impacted by this illness based on race, ethnicity, career, housing, and income. We extend our genuine concern and best wishes to all our Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) stakeholders.

BCPS and the Baltimore County Department of Health have a long history of working collaboratively to support the health of families and staff. This relationship has formed a solid foundation for prioritizing the health and safety of BCPS students and staff as we address teaching and learning during this crisis.

As we approach the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, our goal remains to ensure that students are able to attend school in person, every day. To achieve this goal, we must ensure that the risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection at school is as low as possible. We have worked with the Baltimore County Department of Health as well as experts from University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins to design plans to mitigate infection risks for students and staff. We will continue to collaborate with health experts as we monitor and respond to changing conditions.

This plan provides specific guidance about the health and safety guidelines that we will implement and follow in our schools. Together we are dedicated to establishing guidelines that protect our BCPS family.

The health and safety guidelines set forth in this "Safety Is Our True North" document establish how and when we will make decisions about mitigation practices, based on the best available resources and guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), public health experts, and existing research. As the pandemic continues to evolve, we will make adjustments as necessary, always keeping health and safety foremost in our minds.

We all play an important role in stopping the spread of this virus and promoting public health. A strong partnership between BCPS staff, students, and parents is an essential component of a safe and positive learning environment. We can support one another by getting vaccinated, staying home when sick, practicing physical distancing, wearing a face covering if we haven't been vaccinated, and frequently washing our hands.

Sincerely,

Darryl L. Williams, Ed.D. Superintendent

Michael J. Zarchin, Ed. D. Chief of School Climate and Safety

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

In alignment with the BCPS strategic plan, "The Compass: Our Pathway to Excellence," Focus Area 2, Safe and Supportive Environments, BCPS confirms that the social and emotional well-being of students and staff has been and will continue to be a systemwide priority.

In addition to our enhanced instructional approach, BCPS will emphasize social-emotional learning (SEL) and community-building for students, staff, and families. Every effort will be made to reconnect, heal, and build as staff and students convene in schools and virtual spaces. Research and guidance into the reopening of schools stresses the importance of SEL instruction, SEL supports, and community building. To support reopening, the Department of Social-Emotional Supports has developed additional strategies, support documents, and recommendations/guidance in the following areas for student and staff well-being.

Student Well-Being	Staff Well-Being
 Promote healing and build community (in light of COVID-19 and racial reckoning). Use universal strategies to identify student concerns and needs. Provide a system of supports and interventions for student social-emotional well-being, mental health, and overall wellness. Continue student and family outreach and support. Offer professional learning for related service providers to address student social-emotional well-being. Expand the Culture of Care initiative and Mind Over Matters campaign. 	 Promote healing and build community (in light of COVID-19 and racial reckoning). Support staff's social-emotional well-being, mental health, and overall wellness. Support school leaders and central office-based leaders. Expand the Culture of Care initiative and Mind Over Matters campaign.

Additionally, the "Connecting as a Collective Community SEL 30-Day Plan" speaks to BCPS' "whole child" approach to education that encompasses methods, strategies, and services that enable schools to support a comprehensive approach to learning and development. We know that to effectively address the needs of the whole child, school staff should collaborate with families, caregivers, and community agencies to deliver integrated services that promote improved access to health and learning supports, high expectations, and positive school and workplace climates.

Presently, this is being accomplished universally through the provision of interventions that are inclusive of Mind Over Matters, a host of student mentoring and resource programs, as well as implementation of social-emotional practices and supports that cultivate social-emotional competence and capacity and direct service provision for some of our students.



Plans for Monitoring Community Transmission

In spring of 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the <u>Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation</u> that provided additional guidance about school operations during the pandemic. This report identified two key metrics: the total new cases per 100,000 residents in the past seven (7) days and the percentage of NAATs* that were positive in the past seven (7) days (see Table 1).

CDC categories for COVID transmission are:

Table 1. CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-191

Indicator	Low Transmission Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days ²	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days ³	<5.0%	5.0%-7.9%	8.0%-9.9%	≥10.0%

^{*}NAATs refers to nucleic acid amplification tests, the term used for molecular COVID-19 tests that includes the RT-PCR test. This metric is similar to Maryland's reporting system, although Maryland uses the percentage of all positive tests, both antigen and molecular.

In keeping with the guidance from the public health experts, BCPS will continue to monitor COVID metrics using the CDC tracker as well as Maryland and Baltimore County data trackers. COVID data and trends will be reviewed bi-weekly by the BCPS COVID-19 Task Force which includes key stakeholders and experts from the Baltimore County Department of Health, as well as weekly COVID-19 meetings with medical experts from University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins. BCPS will guide its mitigation strategies by the level of transmission in the community. Decisions about mitigation, such as relaxing requirements for masks and physical distancing will be informed by metrics on the spread of COVID in Baltimore County as well as latest guidance from health experts at the county, state, and national levels.

BCPS will report the metrics for each week on its <u>COVID-19 Data Dashboard</u>. On the COVID-19 dashboard BCPS will also report the total number of students and staff diagnosed with COVID and quarantined due to contact with persons with COVID as well as any school outbreaks.

Key Mitigation Strategies: Throughout the 2020-21 school year, state and federal experts identified and fine-tuned disease control practices, termed mitigation strategies, that would reduce the risk of catching or transmitting an infection. Studies from the 2020-21 school year revealed the effectiveness of these various strategies and are summarized in the CDC Science Brief, <u>Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs</u>.

The CDC identified nine key prevention strategies that schools should use to slow the spread. The prevention strategies include:

- 1. Promoting vaccination
- 2. Consistent and correct mask use
- 3. Physical distancing
- 4. Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks
- 5. Ventilation
- 6. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- 7. Staying home when sick and getting tested
- 8. Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine
- 9. Cleaning and disinfection.

To inform students, parents/guardians, and employees about these mitigation strategies, BCPS staff have adopted a multi-level communication plan that includes a variety of resources on the system website, regular updates to parents and staff about changes in the mitigation plan, employee education, and lessons for students about disease control practices.



Requirements: COVID-19 vaccine is not required for students or staff.

Resources: BCPS continues to collaborate with staff from the Baltimore County Department of Health to make COVID-19 vaccines accessible to staff, students, and their families. COVID-19 vaccines will be provided in schools with school-based wellness centers. BCPS will collaborate with the Baltimore County Department of Health to offer vaccine clinics at schools on evenings and weekends, when possible. Students and staff may access the schedule for the weekly vaccine clinics on the Baltimore County COVID-19 <u>Vaccine</u> Hub.



The BCPS plan to meet CDC's key mitigation strategies is as follows:

Requirements: All persons, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a face covering while inside a school. Exceptions to this requirement are:

- The person is alone in a private space.
- The person is eating or drinking.
- The person has a documented physical or developmental disability that makes wearing a mask unsafe.
- The person is under the age of two.

In accordance with the February 1, 2021, CDC order, masks must be worn by all occupants on school buses unless:

- The person is receiving healthcare or experiencing trouble breathing
- The person has a documented physical or developmental disability that makes wearing a mask unsafe.

The parent of a student who has a bona fide medical condition that prevents the student from being able to wear a face covering may submit medical documentation of the need for an exclusion to the BCPS Office of Health Services.

Resources: Each school, office, and school bus have a supply of disposable face coverings for students and employees who forget their face covering or whose face covering becomes soiled or damaged. Posters reminding staff and students about proper use of face coverings are posted at the entrance of all schools and offices as well as in strategic locations throughout the buildings. For more information, see Face Covering Guidelines and Face Covering FAQ's

SOCIAL DISTANCING TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE

Requirements: Physical distancing of students from each other and between students and adults will be provided to the greatest extent possible, considering school enrollment and facility constraints. To maximize physical distancing for employees and students, the following practices will be used as appropriate in each setting:

- Use of classroom and cafeteria configurations that provide maximal separation between students.
- Plans for arrival, dismissal and change of classes to reduce gathering of students in any area (e.g., use of one-way traffic in hallways, sending students immediately to classrooms upon arrival at school, staggered departure at end of day).
- Restriction of field trips to day trips only, with plans to reduce exposure to large crowds.
- Plans for supervision of restrooms, locker rooms, and school lockers to prevent congregation of students.

Resources: Posters reminding staff and students to maintain physical distancing are posted in strategic locations in all schools and offices. See <u>Physical Distancing FAQs.</u>



Requirements: Persons with COVID-19 symptoms will be required to be tested or will be placed on quarantine, in alignment with <u>guidance</u> from the Maryland Department of Health. Unvaccinated employees and student athletes will participate in weekly screening testing.

Resources: School nurses offer antigen and PCR testing to persons who develop symptoms of COVID-19 in school. Through Maryland Department of Health's K-12 COVID Testing Program, BCPS has partnered with CIAN Labs to provide weekly COVID-19 PCR testing for all unvaccinated staff and student athletes, as well as for staff and student athletes who have registered for weekly testing. These tests are provided at a variety of school locations. BCPS has also partnered with CIAN Labs for *Rapid Response* testing at schools with unusually high or persistent COVID-19 infection rates; decisions to use *Rapid Response* testing are made in consultation with the Baltimore County Department of Health.



Requirements: Staff must immediately report concerns about malfunction of ventilation equipment to staff from the Office of Physical Facilities.

Resources: Staff from the Department of Facilities Management and Strategic Planning has verified the operation of ventilation dampers and controls to provide the proper number of air exchanges per hour. BCPS staff reviewed building mechanical systems to increase ventilation and filtration to the equipment's capacity.



Requirements: Employees and students have been instructed to adhere to best practices in hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol should be used.
- Allocate times for hand washing to include before and after meals, upon arrival to schools/offices and home, before and after use of any shared items, after use of the restroom, after use of the playground, after sneezing/coughing, and any other time hands are contaminated.
- Unmasked individuals must practice respiratory etiquette by covering coughs and sneezes with their arm or sleeve. Persons wearing face masks should keep the mask in place during coughs and sneezes and should also cover the cough or sneeze with their arm or sleeve.

Resources: To support regular hand washing, BCPS staff have sufficient supplies of soap, paper towels, alcoholbased hand sanitizer, and tissues. BCPS staff have installed hand sanitizer stations in school lobbies and outside of each cafeteria. Schools and offices have supplemented handwashing supplies by providing hand sanitizer in strategic locations, including places where is increased risk/frequency of use of shared items or contact between students/staff. Posters reminding students and staff to regularly wash hands are posted throughout schools and offices. Students will be taught and reminded about respiratory etiquette and handwashing at the beginning of summer school as well as upon return to school on August 30, 2021.



Requirements: Students and staff should stay home as follows:

- If they are sick. They should consult with their healthcare provider to determine if COVID-19 testing is indicated.
- If they have tested positive for COVID-19. They should alert their school nurse or supervisor of their positive test.
- If they have had recent close contact with a person who has COVID-19 infection. They should notify their school nurse or supervisor for guidance.
 - Vaccinated persons may report to school or work as long as they do not have symptoms of COVID-19. They should continue to report the exposure to their supervisor or school nurse.
- If they are awaiting a COVID-19 test result.

Resources: Staff and students will be reminded of the reasons to stay home and the reporting requirements before the 2021-22 school year begins and will be reminded of them periodically.



Requirements: BCPS staff will continue to provide safe and clean school environments by ensuring daily cleaning of buildings. All cleaning will involve the use of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved germicidal agents that kill coronavirus. Air purifiers have been placed in each school health suite and in all high school weight rooms to enhance ventilation.

BCPS staff will:

- Perform frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-contact surfaces and any shared items, at least daily.
- Promote hand washing before and after touch of shared use items.
- Maintain sufficient supplies of soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer.



Requirements: In collaboration with Baltimore County Department of Health, the BCPS Office of Health Services has established protocols for response to persons with COVID-19 illness, exposure to COVID-19, and/or symptoms of COVID-19. See BCPS Contact Tracing and Testing FAQs.

All employees with recent presence in a BCPS building are required to report the following situations to their supervisor:

- Having a positive test for COVID-19.
- Having contact with a person with COVID-19 illness.

Parents of students experiencing either of the above situations will be directed to report the information to their school nurse.

Response to COVID -19 Case:

- Persons with confirmed COVID-19 are excluded from in-person work and school for at least 10 days from symptom onset and until symptoms have resolved.
- A community notice is issued whenever there is a confirmed case with recent presence in a school.
- Unvaccinated persons with close contact with someone with a confirmed case are quarantined (excluded from in-person school or work) for 10 days.
- Baltimore County Department of Health will be notified of all cases of COVID-19.

Response to Close Contact with a COVID-19 Case:

- Unvaccinated persons with recent close contact with a person with COVID-19 are excluded from inperson work and in-person school for 10 days (14 days if they have a mask exception) from the last close contact.
- Testing five to seven days after exposure is recommended for unvaccinated persons. Persons are given information about community testing resources.
- Vaccinated persons with recent close contact with a person with COVID-19 must wear a mask for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result that is conducted at least 5 days after exposure.

Response to Persons with COVID-19-Like Illness (CLI):

- Students who develop symptoms of CLI will be removed from their classrooms, provided with a face
 mask, and cared for in areas that are at least 6 feet away from other students. They will be sent home
 immediately and excluded from in-person school per the COVID-like Illness Protocol and COVID-like Illness Protocol and <a href="COVID-lik
- Employees with CLI will be sent home immediately.
- Unvaccinated persons with CLI will be excluded from schools/offices for 10 days unless they have a negative COVID test and/or are diagnosed with a specific condition other than COVID-19.

ADDITIONAL MITIGATION MEASURES

In addition to the key measures identified by the CDC, BCPS has supplemented its mitigation plan with additional measures including:

Shared Objects: When objects must be shared, staff will remind students and their colleagues of the need for hand washing before and after use of shared objects Shared objects will be cleaned whenever visibly soiled, regularly when used by a single classroom, and daily if shared by multiple classrooms.

Visitors: Virtual visits are encouraged, when appropriate, based on the purpose of the visit/meeting. Indoor visits and volunteers are permitted. Plans for indoor visits and volunteers should support efforts to provide maximal physical distancing. Volunteers must follow the established BCPS volunteer guidelines as outlined in Superintendent's Rule 1260.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): In collaboration with medical experts at the Baltimore County Department of Health, BCPS staff reviewed CDC and federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines regarding PPE and developed guidance documents on appropriate PPE for classroom staff and school nurses. BCPS staff have purchased and distributed the following PPE to school staff:

- KN95 masks for school health personnel.
- Face shields for school health personnel and all classroom staff.
- Disposable gloves for persons who come into contact with body fluids.
- Disposable gowns for persons caring for students with COVID-like illness and for persons who may come into contact with body fluids.

Health Services Protocols: Schools are staffed with a registered school nurse. Students who develop symptoms of COVID-19 during the school day will be cared for by the school nurse until they are picked up by parents/caregivers. Protocols have been developed for care of students with COVID-19 like-illness and response to cases.

Transportation Protocols: Buses will be operated with roof hatches vented and windows lowered to the first position (weather permitting) to allow increased ventilation throughout the bus.

Compliance Monitoring: Staff from the Department of School Safety will respond to reports or concerns of non-compliance with mitigation.



