



**Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Plan
Initially Adopted by the NPS Board of Education
6/24/2021**

**Amended 09-13-2021, 12-13-2021, 01-10-2022,
06-15-2022**

Please note that this plan will be reviewed at least every six months and may be adjusted as new information/guidance becomes available.

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Introduction

The Norfolk Public Schools' COVID-19 Return to School Committee developed our initial COVID-19 safety protocols during the summer of 2020. This plan allowed us to successfully return to in-person learning and remain in-person throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

This current plan was updated in June of 2021 for the 2021-2022 school year, based upon new guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Nebraska Association of Local Health Departments (NALHD), the Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department (ELVPHD), the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), and the United States Department of Education. The format, components, and name have all been adjusted to meet the requirements set forth by the American Rescue Act (ARA).

Team

Dr. Jami Jo Thompson, Superintendent

Dr. Bill Robinson, Associate Superintendent of Business Services

Angie Baumann, Director of Human Resources and Accreditation -- and NPS

Parent Mary Luhr, Director of Student Programs

Beth Nelson, Director of Teaching and Learning

Erik Wilson, Director of Student Services and Safety -- and NPS parent

Candace Schmidt, Director of Communications -- and NPS parent

Mary Hoiem, Executive Assistant

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Jamie Blum, Elementary Teacher

Kari Cronin, Elementary Teacher

Kimberly Erickson, Middle School Teacher

Alecia Amezcua, Senior High Teacher and President of the Norfolk City Education Association

Melissa Anderson, Junior High Teacher

Sandy Dieckman, Senior High Teacher

Matthew Arens, Technology Specialist

Leonor Fuhrer, NPS Parent

Alisha Rumans, NPS Parent

Melissa Jantz, Preschool Principal -- and NPS Parent

Angie Hausmann, Elementary Principal -- and NPS Parent

Trisha Andreasen, Elementary Principal and NPS Parent

Amy Brown, Elementary Principal -- and NPS Parent

Bruce Strong, Elementary Principal

Tracy Lichty, Elementary Principal -- and NPS Parent

Ryan Specht, Elementary Principal -- and NPS Parent
 Jamie London, Elementary Principal – and NPS Parent
 Chuck Hughes, Middle School Principal -- and NPS Parent
 Dr. Jennifer Robinson, Junior High Principal -- and NPS Parent
 Beau Viergutz, Junior High Assistant Principal-- and NPS Parent
 Dr. Derek Ippensen, Senior High Principal -- and NPS Parent
 Jason Settles, Senior High Assistant Principal -- and NPS Parent
 John Erwin, Senior High Assistant Principal -- and NPS Parent
 David Nelson, Senior High Dean of Students -- and NPS Parent

Guiding Principles

Vision:

It is the vision of the Norfolk Public Schools to be a top-performing school that provides outstanding educational opportunities for every student and is a source of pride and an asset to our community.

Mission:

The mission of Norfolk Public Schools is to prepare all students to pursue their goals for the future.

Motto:

NPS: Nothing Prevents Success!

Planning Purpose:

The purpose of this Safe Return to In-Person Instruction Plan is to provide a framework for the return of students to Norfolk Public Schools' facilities in a manner that maximizes student safety and learning.

This plan is dynamic in nature, meaning that it can be adapted and updated throughout the pandemic, based upon COVID incidences within our community and guidance from local, state and federal government and health officials.

COVID Transmission Levels

This plan has been developed based upon the COVID Transmission Levels/Positivity Rates experienced currently within our schools and our geographical region. Positive cases within Norfolk Public Schools have been miniscule in the last few months and health officials within the ELVPHD have stated:

- “Case counts within our region have been extremely low.”

If COVID Transmission Levels/Positivity Rates increase, these plans may be revised to include

additional COVID mitigation measures.

Layered Prevention

The CDC recommends that all schools implement and layer prevention strategies, including: the universal, correct use of masks, physical distancing, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, and contact tracing (in combination with isolation and quarantine). To quote the CDC, “All prevention strategies provide some level of protection, and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of protection. Schools should adopt prevention strategies to the largest extent practical--a layered approach is essential.”

Research supports this approach. Lessler et. al. (June 2021) found a strong relationship between the number of mitigation measures implemented and the risk of COVID-19 outcomes among adult household members of students. Each strategy implemented resulted in a 9% decrease in COVID-like illnesses within student households. Furthermore, the increased risk of in-person learning actually disappeared when seven or more mitigation measures were used.

Components

This plan addresses all of the components required by the American Rescue Plan,

- including:
- Universal and Correct Wearing of Masks
 - Modifying Facilities to Allow for Physical Distancing
 - Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette
 - Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities, Including Improving Ventilation
 - Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine, in Collaboration with the State, Local, Territorial, or Tribal Health Departments
 - Diagnostic and Screening Testing
 - Efforts to Provide Vaccinations to School Communities
 - Appropriate Accommodations for Children with Disabilities with Respect to Health and Safety Policies
 - Coordination with State and Local Health Officials, Including the Needs for Support and Technical Assistance to Implement Strategies Consistent to the Greatest Extent Practicable, with Relevant CDC Guidance (Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention/CDC)
 - Ensuring Continuity of Services
 - Consideration of Public Comments

Additional Components

The Norfolk Public Schools has also implemented strategies in the following areas, which are not required by the American Rescue Plan:

- Symptom Screenings
- Food Service

Universal and Correct Wearing of Masks

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Face masks are encouraged for staff and students who have not been vaccinated.
2. Face masks may be required temporarily for staff and students within a specific building if COVID-19 cases rise and the administration believes that this safety precaution is necessary to prevent further spread and a possible school closure. **Rationale:**

Center for Disease Control 5/13/2021:

Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.

Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors 5/14/2021:

Masks are NOT included as an action that schools should take in order to avoid COVID-19 outbreaks. Masks are included as an action that individuals can take to help their schools avoid COVID-19 outbreaks.

The Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department 5/17/2021:

- Mask requirements are no longer listed as a guideline for schools. They are now considered an individual's responsibility.
- Because schools have less student density in buildings during summer school, this is a natural transition point in regards to moving away from masks.
- Not wearing a mask at school will not result in a quarantine.

Governor Ricketts' Executive Order, May 24, 2021

- Face masks and coverings are not to be required by any state agency.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, June 3, 2021

- I believe the guidance to wear masks in schools will be lifted before classes resume in the fall.

Modifying Facilities to Allow for Physical Distancing

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Social Distancing will be practiced to the greatest extent possible, with a goal of maintaining 3 feet between students where feasible.
2. Nonessential furniture will be removed to maximize distance between students.
3. Student desks/tables will face in the same direction, where possible.
4. Physical (plexi-glass) barriers may be used for additional protection if desired.
5. Non-essential visitors and volunteers may be limited if case levels increase.
6. Six feet of social distancing may be encouraged for all students if COVID-19 cases rise and the administration believes that this safety precaution is necessary to prevent further spread and a possible school closure.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- In elementary schools, students should be at least 3 feet apart.
- In middle schools and high schools, students should be at least 3 feet apart in areas of low, moderate or substantial community transmission. In areas of high community transmission middle and high schools students should be 6 feet apart if cohorting is not possible.
- Remove nonessential furniture and make other changes to classroom layouts to maximize distance between students. Face desks in the same direction, where possible.
- Limit nonessential visitors, volunteers and activities.

Greta Massetti, leader of the CDC's Community Interventions Task Force -- as reported by the Associated Press-- March 19, 2021

- We don't really have the evidence that 6 feet is required in order to maintain low spread. Also, younger children are less likely to get seriously ill from the coronavirus and don't seem to spread it as much as adults do, and that allows us the confidence that 3 feet of physical distance is safe."
- We don't have a lot of evidence of the effectiveness of plastic shields or other barriers.

Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Proper handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette will be taught, reinforced and monitored.
2. If handwashing is not feasible, hand sanitizer will be provided and used.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring to ensure adherence among students, teachers, and staff. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be used.
- Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue when not wearing a mask and immediately wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Support healthy hygiene behaviors by providing adequate supplies.

Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities, Including Improving Ventilation

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. High-touch surfaces will be cleaned frequently and routinely (at least daily and between uses when possible).
2. Shared supplies and equipment will be sanitized between uses.
3. Heating, Ventilation and Air condition setting will maximize ventilation and bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
4. Air filters will be changed at least once per semester.
5. Exhaust fans will be used, where available.
6. Windows will be opened, where feasible.

Rationale:**Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:**

- Make changes to physical spaces to maintain a healthy environment and facilities, including improving ventilation and routinely cleaning high-touch surfaces.
- Improve ventilation to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. This can be achieved through:
 - Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
 - Ensure HVAC settings are maximizing ventilation.
 - Filter and/or clean the air in the school by improving the level of filtration as much as possible.
 - Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.
 - Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.
- Regularly clean high touch surfaces and objects (for example: playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, toilets, drinking fountains) within the school and on school buses at least daily or between use as much as possible.

Contract Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine, in Collaboration with the State, Local, Territorial, or Tribal Departments:

Although our goal is to keep all students in school with masks optional, additional Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols may be needed under the following circumstances:

1. **COVID-19 Positive or Symptomatic (Vaccinated or Unvaccinated)** ➤ Stay home for five days, beginning with the day of your positive test or onset of symptoms
 - On day six, if symptoms are gone or getting better and no fever, you can return to school. **You must wear a mask for five more days.**
 - On day six, if you have a fever, continue to stay home until your fever is gone and your symptoms are getting better. **You must wear a mask until you reach day 10.**
 - If you return to school prior to 10 days, you must wear a mask. If you choose not to wear a mask, you must stay home for the entire 10 days.
2. Students and staff who are **exposed** to a COVID-19 positive individual are to **self-monitor** for 14 days in lieu of quarantine.
3. Students and staff who develop symptoms after being exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual are to self-isolate for 10 days past symptom onset.

4. Students and staff who develop symptoms (but have no known exposure are to quarantine for 10 days unless they test negative or get an alternative diagnosis from a doctor.

5. NPS will monitor our levels of COVID-19 positivity and total illness --by building. This information will be ~~posted on our website and will be~~ used by schools in the following manner:

- We will notify parents if there are 2 or more active COVID cases within their child's class.
- We will temporarily implement increased social distancing, mask mandates and/or remote learning --if needed based upon COVID cases --by school building.

General Criteria/Trigger Points:

- COVID positivity rate reaches 2-3% and/or total student absenteeism (for all illnesses) reaches 10-15% within a building -- temporarily

increase social distancing and consider a mask mandate

- COVID positivity rate over 3% and/or total student absenteeism (for all illnesses) over 15% -- temporary mask mandate; consider remote learning

- Other Factors to be Considered:

- Positivity Rate by 1 and 3 Week Intervals
- Type of Spread (Linked or Random)
- Ability to Cohort
- Vaccination Availability
- Positivity Rate within the Community (if available)
- Ability to Fill Staffing Positions
- Virus Containment and Efficiency
- Impact on Families and Community

- We will also monitor COVID cases by individual classes, so that we can temporarily implement increased social distancing, mask mandates and/or remote learning --if needed-- based upon COVID cases in specific classes.

- This may not be realistic at the secondary level, but could be implemented fairly efficiently/effectively at the elementary level.
- Individual class data will not be publicly reported--as it could result in the unintentional identification of positive individuals.

6. The Superintendent can make temporary changes to this plan, to be confirmed/approved by the Board at the next scheduled board.

7. COVID positivity rates may be posted on the website via a Dashboard if case counts increase to a concerning level.

Rationale:

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, July 2, 2021:

- Those who are confirmed positive for COVID-19 are to self-isolate for 10 days past symptom onset.
- Those who are exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual (but do not have symptoms) are to self-monitor for 14 days in lieu of quarantine.
- Those who develop symptoms after being exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual are to self-isolate for 10 days past symptom onset.

Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department, August 2021

- ELVPHD will inform the school when we become aware of a positive individual who is associated with a school.
- We are asking for our schools to monitor their levels of confirmed COVID-19 positive individuals in their classrooms/cohorts and adopt a stepped notification approach to help ensure that case levels and transmission/spread are being monitored.

NPS Return to School Plan, 2020-2021

- These procedures are very similar to last year's procedures, which served us quite well.

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Students and staff who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms will be encouraged to stay home and to be tested.
2. If COVID levels rise, NPS will consult with the ELVPHD to determine if screening testing should be offered to students and/or staff.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- When schools implement testing combined with prevention strategies, they can detect new cases to prevent outbreaks, reduce the risk of further transmission, and protect students, teachers and staff from COVID-19.
- At all levels of community transmission, schools should offer referrals to diagnostic testing to any student, teacher, or staff member who is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 at school.
- Schools should advise students, teachers and staff to stay home if they are sick or if they have been exposed. Schools can encourage these individuals to talk to their healthcare provider about getting a COVID-19 test.
- Some schools may also elect to use screening testing. Screening testing is recommended for students in areas with moderate, substantial, and high levels of community transmission. It is recommended for staff at all levels.

Efforts to Provide Vaccinations to School Communities

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Norfolk Public Schools provided the opportunity for on-site vaccinations for all staff.
2. Norfolk Public Schools provided information to parents and students regarding when/how they could receive vaccinations within the community.
3. Norfolk Public Schools will continue to monitor information regarding vaccinations and provide updates to staff, students and parents, when necessary.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- Vaccines are an important tool to help stop the COVID-19 pandemic. • School officials and health departments can work together to support messaging and outreach about vaccination for members of school communities.
- School communication platforms can facilitate outreach to encourage vaccination of household members of school age children.

Appropriate Accommodations for Children with Disabilities with Respect to Health and Safety Policies

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Students IEPs and 504 Plans will be followed. These may include accommodations that apply to the health and safety of students, relative to COVID-19.
2. Students with underlying health conditions may participate in remote learning if the school is provided with medical documentation indicating that this is necessary.
3. Students with disabilities may be prioritized for in-person learning if cases rise to the level where hybrid or home-based learning is required.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- Federal and state disability laws, to the extent, applicably require an individualized approach for students with disabilities consistent with the students' IEP or 504 Plan.
- Schools should consider prioritizing in-person instruction for students with disabilities who require special education and related services directly provided in school environments.
- Families of students who are at increased risk of severe illness should be given the option of virtual instruction regardless of the mode of learning offered.

Coordination with State and Local Health Officials, Including the Needs for Support and Technical Assistance to Implement Strategies Consistent to the Greatest Extent Practicable, with Relevant CDC Guidance (Operations Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention/CDC)

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. We will continue to collaborate with our local and state health department on a regular basis, monitoring case levels and new guidance, and implementing or revising strategies when necessary.
2. This plan will be revised at least once every 6 months, per ARA requirements.

Rationale:

Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:

- School administrators, working with local public health officials, should assess the level of community transmission to understand the burden of disease in the community. The transmission level for any given location will change over time and should be reassessed weekly for situation awareness and to continuously inform planning and decision-making.
- Information about levels of community transmission should be combined with information about cases in schools and implementation of prevention strategies to guide decision-making. Implementation of prevention strategies should be intensified if indicators worsen.

Ensuring Continuity of Services

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Our goal is to continue to provide in-person learning to all students, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and mental health via the many programs in place within our schools. We will return to a regular school year schedule that follows our normal curriculum, assessment, and PLC cycles.
2. We have developed a comprehensive PK-12 transition plan which includes on-site and virtual interventions and services for students, as well as before and after school tutoring.
3. If COVID cases rise significantly and we are required to close a school, every effort will be made to provide these services virtually, all special education services will be provided according to students' IEPs, and families will be provided with access to free meals.
4. Additional Chromebooks and internet hotspots have been purchased in order to ensure equitable access for students.

Rationale:**Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:**

- Prolonged periods of remote or virtual learning can have negative effects on educational progress for students, potentially slowing or reversing academic gains.
- Safe, in-person schooling can also offset the negative social, emotional and mental health impacts of prolonged virtual learning.
- Students from low-resourced communities, English learners, and students with disabilities might disproportionately experience learning loss due to limited access to remote learning technology and fewer learning support symptoms and services outside of schools.

Consideration of Public Comments

June 9, 2021: Draft sent to administrators for review

June 10, 2021: In person discussion of the plan by administration, including suggestions for improvement, concerns, etc.

June 11, 2021: Draft sent to Return to School Committee for review June 15, 2021: The Return to School Committee met in person to discuss the plan, including suggestions for improvement, concerns, etc.

June 16, 2021: The revised plan was sent to the Return to School Committee for review. June 22, 2021: The revised plan was posted on our website with a link for public feedback.

June 24, 2021: The plan was presented to the NPS Board of Education at a public meeting where public comments were accepted.

June 25, 2021: The final, board approved plan was posted on the NPS website:

www.norfolkpublicschools.org.

June 15, 2022: DRAFT revised plan sent to Return to School Committee for review

Symptom Screenings

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Families will be encouraged to screen students for COVID symptoms, and follow the ELVPHD's guidance regarding testing and quarantine/isolation.
2. Norfolk Public Schools' normal health procedures will be followed:
 - a. Students and staff who are sick must stay home.
 - b. Students and staff must be fever free for 24 hours(without medication) before returning to school.
3. If COVID cases rise, on-site symptom checks may be reinstated for everyone entering an NPS facility.

Rationale:

Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department, June 1, 2021

- We recommend that you follow the school's normal illness protocol and encourage the individual to test for COVID 19 if they have symptoms. Testing is up to the individual, but should be encouraged when warranted.
- The decision to pre-screen individuals before entering school buildings can be determined by the school/district. Pre-screening the masses is not something that I would imagine too many institutions will elect to do unless there is a concerning increase in community transmission levels or concerning levels of illness within a particular entity.
- During the 2020-2021 school year, 518,899 symptom checks were performed, with only 5 students exhibiting COVID symptoms. This is 0.001% or 1/1000th of a percent.

Food Service:

Mitigating Measures/Safety Protocols:

1. Water fountains will be reopened. However, students and staff may bring water bottles to school. Refilling stations will be available throughout the day.
2. If cases rise to the level where hybrid or home-based learning is required arrangements will be made for qualifying families to continue receiving free student meals.

Rationale:**Center for Disease Control, May 15, 2021:**

- Avoid offering any self-serve food or drink options such as hot and cold food bars, salad or confinement bars, and drink stations.
- Schools should develop plans to continue meal service provision, such as free breakfast and lunch to families for every learning mode, including in-person, hybrid, and virtual.

Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department, June 14,2021:

- “If your business has a water fountain that has been closed down during COVID-19, we are now encouraging these to be opened for use.”

Summary

Norfolk Public Schools is committed to providing students and staff with a safe, in-person learning environment. The strategies outlined within this plan will be implemented to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spread within our schools. These strategies will be revised periodically (at least every 6 months) based upon COVID cases within our schools and community and any new research/evidence that becomes available.

Resources

Center for Disease Control (May 13,2021).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

Center for Disease Control (May 15, 2021). Operations Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention,

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html)

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Center for Disease Control (May 30, 2022). Quarantine and Isolation,

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department (May 17, 2021). Email consultation.

Lessler, J., Grabowski, M., Grantz, K., Badillo-Goicoechea, E, Metcalf, C., Lupton-Smith, C., Azman, A., & Stuart, E. (June 2021). Household COVID-19 risk and in-person schooling, *Science* 372, 1092-197.

Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors (May 14, 2021). Updated Recommendations to Limit COVID-19's Impact on Schools.

Norfolk Public Schools (June 2021). 2021-2021 Symptom Screening Summary.

Ricketts, P. (May 24,2021). Executive Order 21-06.

<http://govdocs.nebraska.gov/docs/pilot/pubs/eoindex.html>

Stobbe, M. (March 19,2021). CDC changes school guidance, allowing desks to be closer, Associated Press.