

Grundy County Special Education Cooperative

Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

August 2, 2021

To comment on this Plan:

[Feedback Form](#)

Introduction

Sweeping through the world in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in major upheaval to all aspects of life, including unprecedented school closures in the spring and fall of 2020. To open schools for in-person instruction required strict health and safety protocols which created barriers and limitations to teaching and learning. Recognizing that students across remote and in-person settings faced significant academic, social, emotional, and mental health challenges as a result of the interrupted education and the trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Congress made emergency funds available to local school districts to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Most recently, funds available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act require that school districts develop a *Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services*. As such, this plan has been developed in accordance with the ARP Act and the Illinois State Superintendent of Education declaration of July 9, 2021; is aligned with guidance provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and addresses adjustments needed in response to evolving COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. Opportunity for the public to provide input is provided through a Google Forms comment platform, as well as during the August 17, 2021 GCSEC Executive Board Meeting. Upon request, this plan will be provided in an alternative format accessible to parents who are individuals with a disability as defined by the ADA. This plan will also be made publicly available on the cooperative's website. Cooperative strategies in this plan may be removed and/or updated based upon local conditions, levels of community transmission (i.e., low, moderate, substantial, or high), local vaccine coverage, use of screening testing to detect cases in K-12 schools, and consultation with local public health officials to determine the prevention strategies needed. Cooperative officials will communicate any changes in plans to staff members, students, and parents through the cooperative's regular communication platforms.

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

In accordance with the Illinois State Superintendent of Schools July 9, 2021 declaration, GCSEC will be open fully for in-person learning for all student attendance days for the 2021-2022 school year. Homebound instruction will only be made available for non-vaccinated or vaccine ineligible students who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health. If remote learning is required due to a quarantine order, the format will depend on the teacher's preference. Absent an order from the Illinois State Board of Education and/or the Illinois Governor's Office, GCSEC will be in operation in accordance with the CDC's updated (July 9, 2021) *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K)-12 Schools*, also adopted by the IDPH on July 9, 2021. These guidelines include the following:

1. Mask Use

- Mask use is recommended indoors for students, staff and visitors who are not fully vaccinated. Mask use is recommended outdoors during activities (e.g., participating in outdoor play, recess, physical education, sports, extra curriculars) that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission.
- While universal indoor mask use is strongly recommended by the CDC for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, it is not mandated. Additionally, the IDPH is recommending that everyone, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask indoors in areas of substantial and high transmissions,

and in K-12 schools. **GCSEC is requiring all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to follow the policy regarding masking of the district and building to which they are assigned. However, the GCSEC Central Office, River's Edge Academy (REA), and REACH Transition is requiring all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to wear a mask while indoors regardless of vaccination status.** Based on local data and metrics in conjunction with the Grundy County Health Department, this guidance could change at any time. We will continue to monitor this on an on-going basis.

- Unless exempt by CDC Order, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses.

2. Physical Distancing

- To the extent possible within school and classroom structures so that it does not exclude students from full day in-person learning, GCSEC staff are to help students commit to physical distancing as much as possible by:
 - arranging furniture and workstations to reinforce physical distancing of at least 3 feet (at least 6 feet for those who are not fully vaccinated) and movement;
 - providing assigned seating for students and encourage students to remain in these seats to the greatest extent possible; and
 - developing marked paths of travel in classrooms and corridors.
- GCSEC staff will maximize physical distance as much as possible when moving through food service lines and while eating indoors. Aside from 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).

3. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

- GCSEC staff will monitor and reinforce frequent handwashing and respiratory etiquette by:
 - continuing to teach handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
 - assisting young children with handwashing;
 - reminding everyone in the facility to wash hands frequently;
 - using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (for teachers, staff, and older students who can safely use hand sanitizer) when handwashing is not possible;
 - continuing to teach respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes); and
 - providing adequate handwashing and hand sanitizer 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).

4. Facility and Transportation Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation

- GCSEC/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.
- 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.

5. 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.

- Individuals in our school environments who show symptoms of COVID-19 are to immediately report to or be escorted to the school office to be either sent home or be quarantined in the school's supervised safe area while awaiting pickup/evaluation. Students and staff are required to wear masks while in the safe area. Parents should ensure that ill students are picked up from school within 30 minutes of being notified. Ill students will not be allowed to utilize the school bus to return home. To facilitate COVID-19 diagnosis and inform the need for quarantine of close contacts and isolation, a rapid COVID-19 test can be administered on site only with parental consent.
- Students and staff who are not fully vaccinated should quarantine after a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Fully vaccinated people who were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do NOT have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or be tested. Quarantine decisions will be made and communicated by Grundy County Health Department officials.
- Student absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded as excused. To ensure continuity of services, school work missed during such an absence can be requested and made up in accordance with the school's policy (refer to student handbook); social, emotional, mental health, or other needs will be provided in accordance with a student's IEP or 504 Plan. Parents of students who have social, emotional, mental health, or other needs outside of an IEP or 504 Plan should contact their child's program coordinator to discuss needs. Homebound instruction will only be made available for non-vaccinated or vaccine ineligible students who are under quarantine as directed by the local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- Absent COVID-related leave days previously provided by Federal law, staff absences related to a COVID-19 isolation or quarantine will be recorded in accordance with the district's sick leave policy and related professional negotiations agreements. To ensure continuity of services, staff members should contact their principals to discuss support for social, emotional, mental health, or other needs.
- To the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, school health care professionals will continue to collaborate with Grundy County Health Department officials to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, including making notifications to staff and parents as soon as possible regarding those who were in close contact of someone in the school who tested positive for COVID-19.
- The cooperative will inform the school community of outbreaks while maintaining student and staff confidentiality rights.
- Students and staff suspected of having COVID-19, whether they were tested or not, are to follow the CDC guidelines to determine when they can return to school.
- Following quarantine, students and staff returning from illness related to COVID-19 are to call to check in with the school about the appropriate return date.

6. Screening Testing

- The cooperative may be able to accommodate with testing/screening for COVID-19

7. Promoting Vaccination

- Respectful of peoples' varying levels of vaccine confidence, those who want to get vaccinated against COVID-19 can visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find out where they can get vaccinated in our community.

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 program coordinator 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 program coordinator 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

- Nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations with people who are not fully vaccinated are discouraged from visiting schools.

10. Collaboration with Public Health Officials

- Cooperative officials will continue to collaborate and consult with Grundy County Health Department officials throughout a pandemic on various logistics and decision-making including, but not limited to, quarantines, school health and safety protocols, screening testing, contact tracing, vaccine clinics, and emergency school closings.

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 cooperative's website.