



# SOUTH SENECA

## CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Re-Opening Plan for Fall 2021

## (Last edited September 24)

The South Seneca Central School District is, at its core, a community school. We serve the families of Southern Seneca County, and have always been committed to the well-being and enrichment of all those who interact with our schools. We promote a simple statement of our mission in three ideas, three pillars of our work:

**EDUCATION      OPPORTUNITY      COMMUNITY**

As schools across New York State operated their own unique versions of a hybrid learning plan in 2020-21, we worked with our health departments, consulted with our colleagues, and continuously adapted in alignment with the latest guidelines. Our safety plans have always had a section in them for a pandemic, and we did what was necessary in these circumstances, because even above our mission: *the number one priority for us is the health and safety of our community.*

Thankfully beginning in the winter months, an effective set of COVID vaccines began to become available, and by the early summer of 2021, Seneca County was consistently reporting zero active cases. The resurgence of cases in July and August has everyone concerned, but with a majority of eligible community members fully vaccinated, we anticipate a return to full in-person learning for all students, five days per week in September.

We do recognize that as a nation and a planet, we are not “post-pandemic” yet, and conditions will continue to change. We will hold available all five opening models from the 2020-21 school year as possibilities, but for now, *we plan to open both of our buildings on September 7 in Model 2, described below.*

# Five Models for the Fall

No matter how we operate in the Fall of 2021, we will continue to prioritize health and safety for all, and we will address our three pillars of the mission. Our models will fall into one of five broad categories, and we may be forced from one to another as the wider environment, or orders from New York State, evolve. *September 2021 will begin in Model 2.*



1. Fully Operational:  
Business as Usual

Back to normal, without restrictions



2. Everyone Back To School, with specific new procedures and process for all aspects of school life

Clear understandings for transportation, school day, after school extracurriculars and athletics, field trips, and assemblies



3. School Day Only:  
Highly restricted school day, limited movements, concentration on mandated aspects of program only

No activities after school, no assemblies of any kind



4. Hybrid Operations:  
Program delivered partially in-person and partially at home

Wide variation in this model, accommodating variation in comfort levels and personal circumstance



5. Remote Learning:  
Instruction is 100% virtual, with limited and restricted access to buildings

Conditions much like the spring of 2020, with adjustments and enhancements to remote learning, and full understanding of the opportunities for community events

# Model 2: Back To School, But With New Procedures

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**2. Everyone Back To School, with specific new procedures and process for all aspects of school life**

**Clear understandings for transportation, school day, after school extracurriculars and athletics, field trips, and assemblies**

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Under this model, South Seneca will operate as close to a full program as possible, striving for school days that look and feel like the days we are used to experiencing. All variations to our regular procedures will be well communicated and strictly enforced, but outside of these, there will be no other restrictions.

Likely categories of restrictions include, but are not limited to:

- Protocols for riding district buses;
- Restricted access to buildings for non-staff or students;
- Specific procedures for morning entry and afternoon dismissal;
- Understood norms for social distancing and use of PPE;
- Restricted attendance and social distancing for public events and assemblies;
- Regular procedures for checking on health of all staff and students, with acceptable criteria for attendance;
- Potential routine COVID testing for the unvaccinated population, and the vaccinated individuals with symptoms;
- Stricter protocols for monitoring and isolating those with known illnesses

# Transportation

The South Seneca School District is roughly 130 square miles in area, and most students access school transportation of some kind daily. In addition to our campuses in Interlaken and Ovid, South Seneca students attend programs in Ithaca (TST BOCES) and other remote locations as part of their regular school days. Homeless students are transported to and from school each day, wherever they have shelter.

When our athletic programs are operating, student athletes compete throughout Central New York State and use school transportation to arrive and return safely. Our mission to promote and provide opportunities for students includes regular transportation to visit points of interest, near and far.

Under pandemic conditions, South Seneca must make accommodations on all school vehicles to ensure the health and safety of everyone. Even in models where students are learning from home, our drivers are used to deliver regular meals to families in need.

It is very possible that the implementation of new procedures for transportation would increase the number of bus runs, affect the arrival and dismissal times of some students, and necessitate strict limits on non-essential trips.

New guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) this summer will allow for a higher capacity of students riding a bus, but not for removal of masks. Buses will continue to be disinfected between trips, as we did in 2020-21, and every effort will be made to open windows and vents when the outside temperature permits.

# Mental Health

South Seneca cannot fulfill its mission of Education, Opportunity, Community without tending to the mental health of its members. The conditions of isolation and loss of earning power during the pandemic has only added hardship to a county that already faces significant economic and social challenges. As the nation grapples with the shrinking of the middle class and the divide between “haves” and “have nots,” those living in rural poverty face a daily struggle to succeed. For our students, the inherent competition for social status among peer groups manifests in conflict that is only exacerbated by social media culture. We commit at South Seneca to a culture of care—but we are tested again and again by particular incidents and situations, and are only as good as the individuals implementing the programs. We are reminded that every human being in our community, child or adult, carries his or her own burdens.

When we commit to “health and safety first,” we must never omit attention to mental health. We know that every person learns every day, whether the lessons are aligned or not with a teacher’s lesson plans of that day. In moments of depression or despair, a child may not be ready to learn about algebra, but they may be taking in vital information about who they can and cannot trust in a crisis. In formative years, students develop a concept of self-worth and efficacy, and feedback during times of non-productivity can mean the difference between resiliency or complacency. Most students, over time, will develop a resistance or a resentment to an institution that provides mostly rejection or relentless negative feedback.

No matter the model of operation moving forward, we fail in our core mission if our communication to community members is one-way, unfeeling, and dismissive. It is absolutely possible to maintain high academic standards while tending to mental health; in fact, a system that seeks to reject those with low academic grades is essentially abandoning

high standards by being perfectly content to accept high failure rates without intervention.

# Hygiene and Physical Health

It is a permanent part of South Seneca's academic program to teach students of all ages about good hygiene and physical health. We join all public schools in including nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, adequate sleep, stress management, and good decision making in our standard curriculum.

Opening school will include a continued emphasis on in-person education, and practice, of behaviors meant to prevent the spread of contagious disease. Even our youngest students will be taught to wash hands thoroughly and regularly. School days with good weather will include time outside for every student. Extra time and effort will be spent to educate all students about monitoring our health, and the importance of staying home while sick.

The CDC emphasizes the importance of "hand hygiene" as a means to prevent the spread of infectious diseases of all types. Our buildings are filled with signage to remind everyone about the need to wash hands multiple times per day, and we will incorporate age-appropriate protocols into our routines to ensure it is happening.

# Social Distancing

It is fair to say that public schools are not in any way designed to allow for social distancing. Classrooms are not large enough to have more than a dozen or so students six feet apart from one another, and even if they were, most students cannot or will not maintain that distance for any length of time. In many cases, especially with younger students, this will not even be a conscious decision. There are many examples now of written commentary by experienced educators that suggest it is

unrealistic to even plan for such a model. Only the most compliant of students, with a determined objective to follow the rules, will consent to remain distanced from peers throughout the school day. This represents a very small percentage of the population.

Nevertheless, every re-opening plan in every sector of society includes language and expectations for social distancing in some fashion. The CDC decision matrix references social distancing in schools “if feasible.” It would be irresponsible to bring large numbers of people back to school in person without some effort to do social distancing in some manner. South Seneca will commit to a good faith effort to implement reasonable social distance protocols throughout our physical spaces. In general indoors, the standard now is to strive for three feet of distance between individuals when possible, and six feet in those situations where masks might be removed (for example, when eating). Our school population is small enough that this adjustment should be sufficient to manage our spaces.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

COVID-19 is spread through droplets emitted from the mouths and noses of those infected, and the most effective way to prevent that spread is a mask worn by someone carrying the virus. Because so many of the infected are asymptomatic for a time, the strong recommendation by the CDC is that everyone wear a mask while in proximity of others.

For those who are more likely to be in regular contact with the infected, more extensive PPE are required, and some in specialized environments (like public stores or food preparation kitchens, for example) may utilize modified or extra PPE. To keep schools open, South Seneca will need to consider each of its spaces and functions for the most appropriate types and levels of PPE in use. Moreover, if opening depends on mask-wearing, we must exclude those unwilling to wear masks. We will need

to consider the use of masks for young students, and we will consider how best to provide times of the day where people might get “mask breaks” without compromising safety.

NYSED regulations allow for some exceptions for individuals wearing masks, under extreme circumstances. At South Seneca, we cannot guarantee the safety of others in proximity to those not wearing masks, so special arrangements will be made for those not wearing masks for a medical reason to be more distanced than usual from others. As always, the health and safety of the community will take priority in all decision making.

Recognizing that the majority of individuals above the age of 12 are now fully vaccinated, our potential for taking “mask breaks” indoors will expand in 2021-22, especially during weeks where Seneca County is classified in the “Low Transmission” category.

## **Cleaning and Sanitizing Practice**

While the primary burden for cleaning and sanitizing our spaces will continue to fall on our cleaning staff, we must all share the responsibility for maintaining a clean environment if we will be conducting school in person at any capacity.

Each of our cleaners has been trained since the spring on proper, thorough techniques for disinfecting rooms after use. Directors and supervisors are paying close attention to all evolving guidance on cleaning, and incorporating updated methods into daily practice.

One of the purposes to a secondary model that involves the rotating of students in the building on a limited schedule is to provide better opportunities to keep common spaces clean and disinfected. Even in the best of times, our cleaning staff is small in numbers and is challenged to



maintain the large buildings and grounds. We will be working hard this year to continually assess our efficiency and to adjust as necessary.

As we add specialized equipment to office spaces, and reconfigure nurses' offices, classrooms, and new isolation areas, there will be an added burden on cleaning staff to incorporate new procedures for daily tasks. It is one of the primary reasons we will need to rely on adults in rooms to share some of the responsibilities for regularly wiping down commonly touched surfaces.

## **Food Service**

South Seneca has committed to serving breakfast and lunch to all students in need, regardless of which model we are in. For models that include in-person school, we must incorporate protocols for eating meals that include the safe and sanitary use of materials, and reasonable social distancing practice.

It is possible that cafeterias will be used only at a smaller capacity than usual, and students could be eating in the classroom setting, depending on circumstances. If classrooms are being used for meals, the responsibility for cleaning and disinfecting of desks or tables could fall to the adult who is supervising, and special attention would be paid to increasing the distancing between students while masks are removed. In this case, those adults will be trained in safe and proper practice for doing so.

**South Seneca CSD Layers of Mitigating Strategies for the 2021-22 School Year**

The following plan was crafted using varying guiding principles from the latest CDC K-12 guidance, the latest American Academy of Pediatrics guidance, Commissioner Betty Rosa’s memo to the field on July 29th of 2021, and the advocacy letter sent to Governor Cuomo by Wayne-Finger Lakes Superintendents on July 30th of 2021. **Everything below is subject to change pending changes in local health data and/or state or federal guidance adjustments.** The district will monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage and screening testing and make adjustments to our plan as necessary.

This plan is effective September 7, 2021, at which time all South Seneca students will fully return to in-person learning. The plan is applicable to all South Seneca events and activities including the regular school day, athletics, and extracurricular activities.

In 2020-21, South Seneca had zero transmissions of COVID-19 in the school setting and remained open for the school year. As such, this plan was created to maximize opportunity for in-person learning, reduce the risk of school closure, and stop the spread of COVID-19. Our schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this plan emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies to protect people who are not fully vaccinated, including students, teachers, staff, and other members of their households.

Strategy	School Implementation
Vaccination	<p>Encouraged but not required. As such, the health and safety measures in this plan will apply to everyone regardless of their vaccination status.</p> <p>Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
Consistent and correct mask use	<p>New York State Department of Health issued a mandate on August 27 for universal mask wearing indoors, regardless of vaccination status or community transmission rates:</p> <p>“Effective immediately, in accordance with the Commissioner's Determination issued pursuant to 10 NYCRR 2.60, any person over the age of 2 (including all students, personnel, teachers, administrators, contractors, and visitors) must wear masks at all times indoors in P-12 school buildings, regardless of vaccination status. All mask requirements must be applied consistently with any state and federal law (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act).”</p> <p>South Seneca will begin the school year with the following protocols. Any change in mask protocols will be implemented after close consultation with the Seneca County Health Department.</p> <p>Minimum Expectation <b>for indoors:</b></p>

	<p>Masks will be required with the exception of times when eating, or under the direct supervision of a school nurse or counselor. Mask breaks must be taken outdoors.</p> <p>As statewide mandates are updated, this policy will reflect new guidance.</p> <p>Outdoors: Masks are not required when social distancing is maintained.</p>
Physical Distancing	<p>3' minimum distancing requirement in all indoor areas to the extent possible.</p> <p>In general, strive for 6' of distancing indoors in situations where masks are removed (eating, for example).</p> <p>3' minimum distancing requirement outdoors when not masked.</p>
Occupancy Limits	<p>Outdoor occupancy limits are eliminated.</p> <p>Indoor occupancy limits eliminated in low transmission designation. In cases where transmission is moderate, substantial or high, indoor occupancy will include a minimum of 3' of physical distancing.</p>
Transportation	<p>Masks are required on buses at all times.</p> <p>May be more than one student per seat based on number of riders.</p> <p>Assigned seats on buses are recommended for contact tracing purposes.</p> <p>Bus windows and roof hatches should be opened, weather permitting.</p>
Handwashing Hand Sanitizing	<p>All students and staff are expected to use proper hand washing and sanitizing throughout the day.</p> <p>Hand sanitizer will be available in all classrooms and placed throughout the buildings.</p> <p>All students and staff will be trained to follow COVID-19 protocols safely and correctly, including but not limited to hand hygiene, proper face covering wearing, social distancing.</p>
Ventilation	<p>The Director of Facilities shall ensure that all ventilation units are properly working and bringing in outside air and filters are changed as recommended by the manufacturer and/or the BOCES health and safety inspector.</p> <p>Windows will be opened in classrooms, at least partially, as much as possible.</p>

<p>Screening/Health</p>	<p>Students and staff must stay home if they are exhibiting symptoms and call the school nurse and their physician for next steps.</p> <p>Should a person become ill and exhibit symptoms at school, they will wear a mask and be in the nurse's office, separated from others by at least 6' until they are picked up to leave.</p> <p>Guardians of students will be asked at the beginning of the school year to sign a form of attestation indicating they agree to keep students with symptoms home while sick. This attestation form will replace the daily screener tool used in 2020-21.</p>
<p>Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine*</p>	<p>Seating charts will be created for cohorts/classes, buses and lunches to the extent possible.</p> <p>Cohorting will be used whenever possible.</p> <p>The district will continue to work closely with the Department of Public Health and to assist with contact tracing and communicating the need to isolate or quarantine when necessary.</p> <p>The likelihood of having to quarantine is diminished for those who are vaccinated.</p> <p>Any close contacts who test positive for COVID-19 or who have symptoms should begin isolation regardless of vaccination status or prior infection.</p> <p>A close contact is defined as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes.</p> <p>In the classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if <b>both</b> the infected student and the exposed student(s) <b>correctly and consistently</b> wore <b>well-fitting masks</b> the entire time.</p> <p>Fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are recommended to be tested 3-5 days after exposure, regardless of whether they have symptoms.</p> <p>Fully vaccinated people and people who were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 3 months, <b>are not</b> required to quarantine if asymptomatic.</p> <p>For a vaccinated person who is a close contact of a positive <b>and develops symptoms</b>, they would need to immediately mask for 14 days or until tested prior to being released.</p>

Cleaning and disinfection	District will adhere to hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection requirements from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
Medical Accommodations	<p>Per the guidelines established by the New York State Department of Health (DOH), the district priority is a return for all students to in-person instruction.</p> <p>Students with a diagnosis that may require accommodations can request the <i>Medical Accommodation Request for 2021-22 due to COVID-19 Health &amp; Safety Requirement</i> form from the school nurse.</p> <p>Students placed under quarantine or isolation by the Seneca County DOH will have arrangements made to receive assignments and/or remote access to their classes. This may vary based on duration of quarantine/isolation, grade level, content area, etc. Principals, teachers and/or counselors will communicate these details in a quarantine/isolation situation.</p>
Guests	<p>Guests, for educational purposes, will be allowed on a case by case basis. The CDC transmission levels will be referenced to determine if guests will be allowed into the buildings. If transmission levels require a cancellation of the visit, an alternative date and time may be rescheduled.</p> <p>Guests must follow all health and safety protocols in place by the district <b>and will be screened upon entry.</b></p>
Testing for COVID-19	Based on the CDC transmission level (substantial and/or high transmission) schools may initiate voluntary testing through grant funding provided by Seneca County DOH. This testing can prevent the spread of COVID-19, reduce quarantines and maximize in-person instruction. If screening testing is offered, based on the CDC Level of Community Transmission, unvaccinated individuals may be selected from the list of those students whose families voluntarily agreed to allow a student to be tested.
Continuity Plan	In the event there is a closure of a classroom, grade level, building and or the district k-12, due to a positive case(s) the district will shift to the continuity plan.