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Back to School Plans for 2021-2022

August 18, 2021

Dear Shepherd Public Schools Families and Staff:

The district continues to receive questions about what “school” will look like for the 2021-2022 school year. This update will provide you with our plans as of today, which may change should we receive public health orders from CDC, MDHHS, and/or CMDHD. Athletics will adhere to rules set forth by MDHHS and MHSAA.

General Information-Start of 2021-22 Year

What will our instructional model look like?

All students will attend school full-time five days per week following the published school calendar: [Calendar here.](#)

When does school start?

Our first full day of school is on Monday, August 23, 2021.

What is the cost of breakfast and lunch for the 2021-2022 school year?

Breakfast and lunch will be provided free of charge; however, the ala carte items (i.e., a cookie, a bag of chips, a bottle of water, etc.) will have to be purchased.

Will Shepherd Public Schools offer a virtual option for students?

The district will not be offering any type of virtual option. There was not enough demand to make it feasible for the district.

COVID-19 & Communicable Disease Protocols- Start of 2021-2022 Year

Are face masks required at school and what will the metrics/measures be that determine when/if masks are worn?

Shepherd Public Schools plans to continue to watch and monitor the colored band of “COVID-19 Transmission” for Isabella County. We realize that there is a faction of our county that does not accurately represent our own community (a major university) and will keep that in mind. However, we cannot ignore the fact that this data pertains to the county we are part of.

No matter what colored band the county - and subsequently the school district - is in, these factors will remain constant:

- Cases of COVID-19/SARS will be reported to the local health department
- Masks MUST be worn on school buses (Federal mandate)

- Contact tracing will occur.

In terms of masks while at school, masking of students will remain a “choice” by parents of students unless any of these stipulations occur:

- A family member contracts COVID-19/SARS or a similar variant. When this occurs any students within the household will be required to quarantine/be excluded from school and extracurricular activities (October 19, 2021) **UNLESS they are vaccinated. Any student vaccinated may continue to come to school provided they are symptom-free and wear a mask.**
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- The percent positivity rate for the building your student is part of measures above 1% as identified by regular reporting from the health department. If the positivity rate is 1% or above, ALL students and staff in the affected area will be required to wear masks until the positivity rate is cut in half (0.5% or below).

Positivity Rate Matrix(September 21, 2021)

Building	Total Count	Masks On	Masks off
SMS/SHS	989	10	5
Odyssey	95	1	0
SES	717	8	4
Winn	146	2	1

**** (September 21, 2021) Due to the nature of positive cases being reported, immediate response to masking in buildings is a goal. For example, if the mask threshold is met on a Tuesday afternoon, it is important we assign masking regulations the next day (Wednesday) within a week. Similarly, if the “take the mask off” threshold is met at the end of the day on a Wednesday for a particular building, then masks would come off the following day (Thursday) within a week.**

Additional Information:

- All students with a household member tested positive **MUST** quarantine (October 19, 2021) **UNLESS they are vaccinated. Any student vaccinated may continue to come to school provided they are symptom-free and wear a mask.**
- If a child is identified as a close contact (not a household member), parents may choose for their exposed child to not quarantine, they **MUST** wear a mask during the quarantine period to school and all school sport/clubs or activities.
- Changes to our status will be communicated at the end of the week via a Power Announcement message each Friday - letting you know what the plan will be for masks and quarantine for the next week.
- The district’s Covid Response Team will be evaluating on an ongoing basis the factors listed above per building and district wide.
- Based on positivity rates, public access to particular buildings could be restricted at times throughout the school year.

- In terms of buildings, the Board wishes the middle and high schools be put together.

Will Shepherd Public Schools quarantine students and what are the conditions of quarantine?

As stipulated above, parents have the choice - similar to masking their child - to quarantine their child or not. However, if there is a positive case in the household, then the quarantine stipulations must be enacted. (October 19, 2021) **The exception to this rule is IF the student in the household of a positive case is vaccinated. If vaccinated and symptom-free the student may continue to attend school wearing a mask.**

If during the stipulated quarantine period parents choose to send their child to school, then the district requires the student(s) to wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status.

If the percent positivity rate for the building your student is part of measures above 1% as identified by regular reporting from the health department, then ALL students contact traced as being under a quarantine will be required to be excluded from school until the end of the quarantine period. If the percent positivity rate is cut in half (0.5% or below), then the exclusion from school quarantine mandate will be lifted and a child could choose to return to school for the remainder of their quarantine, provided they wear a mask.

(September 14, 2021)

“Due to the known fact that students learn better in school versus being at home, ALL quarantine for a close contact for Shepherd Public Schools will now become the family’s choice unless a family member has COVID-19.” With this choice, the Board requests that any student identified as a close contact do the daily screener/temperature check before coming to school - or use the devices provided at school.

******(September 21, 2021) Additionally, as per MDHHS guidelines, when all students identified as a close contact are masked, there is no need to home quarantine.

If a parent chooses to quarantine/exclude their child from school, then the child must remain quarantined/excluded for the entire period including extra curricular activities. If a parent sends their child to school with a mask and then later in the quarantine period chooses to quarantine/exclude later in the quarantine period then exclusion from school is acceptable.

Will my child be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine in order to attend school?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine is not listed on the School Required Vaccination List. For more information, please see: [School Required Vaccines for Parents by MDHHS](#)

Will you separate students who are vaccinated from students who are unvaccinated?

No. Vaccination status is a personal choice.

Will students be in cohorts in the classroom or on the playground?

Winn- We will be cohorting in the classrooms and on the playground. We will have the playground divided into sections. The cohorts will have a “section” each day to play in during recess. In the classrooms, they will work with only their cohort all day.

SES- Will be cohorting in the classroom and on the playground. Students will be eating lunch in the cafeteria as a grade level, but will be seated with only their cohorted class and spaced out every other seat. The cohorting will also take place on the playground at recess.

Will contact tracing continue?

Schools are required to report communicable diseases to their local health department within 24 hours. Positive or probable COVID-19 cases will be reported to the Isabella County Central Michigan District Health Department following our Communicable Disease Board Policy 8450 and Michigan Law Act No. 368 of the Public Acts of 1978. For a complete list of reportable diseases, please see the following document: [2021 Reportable Diseases](#). When there is a positive or probable case within a classroom, an exposure letter or correspondence from the school (Powerschool announcement/email) will be sent home to parent(s) just as we do with other communicable diseases such as chicken pox.

Will student athletes need to be tested for COVID-19 to participate?

No, MDHHS and MHSAA lifted all requirements for student testing as of June 22, 2021.

Will students continue to be required to wear masks and use hand sanitizer on our buses?

With regard to students riding school buses, **students must wear masks**. The use of hand sanitizer will continue to be made available to all students.

Will schools promote and encourage hand washing and good coughing and sneezing etiquette?

Shepherd Public Schools taught these behaviors prior to the pandemic and we will continue after post pandemic. A method used is, wash on the way in and sanitize on the way out.

Will schools continue their cleaning routine from the 2021-2022 school year?

Yes, Shepherd Public Schools will continue to employ a day time custodian to continue the processes we put in place for pandemic.

Will schools be avoiding crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities?

No, we have installed filters and UV lighting in all of our HVHC units throughout the school for better ventilation and improved air quality.

Are we having lockers at the Middle School and High School?

SMS- We will be utilizing lockers this year. Students will be able to place their backpack and other belongings in their lockers prior to breakfast every morning. This will alleviate crowding in classrooms. Then they will be able to pick up their belongings at the end of each day from their locker prior to going home.

SHS- Students will be provided lockers this year. Students will place backpacks and coats in their lockers. We are limiting time between classes and students should not be stopping at their locker. Students will need a chromebook, bag, pencil and binder. We do not have textbooks.

Will class transitions and end of the day release stagger?

Winn- We will be cohorting our classes this year. Classes will move to specials in the hallways at their designated times. End of day release will be through their classroom doors to eliminate large amounts of students in the hallways.

SES- We will dismiss by class and grade level.

SMS- We will stagger our release of students from class to class.

SHS- We will not have a stagger release for students.

ODY- Students will be released via PA. Students riding the bus will be released first, others will be released after the SPS bus leaves.

Is lunch structured the same as last year?

Winn- Last year kids ate in their classrooms. This year, K-2 and 3-5 will have separate lunch times. Each cohort will have their own tables. There will be 6 feet between the cohorts in the cafeteria.

SES- All students will be eating lunch in the cafeteria, but with only their own grade level. Students will have an assigned seat by classroom and be separated.

SMS- Lunch will be similar to last year. Students will eat in either the cafeteria or the gym. We will hold two lunch periods to accommodate our students.

SHS- All students will have lunch from 11:55-12:25. High school campus is open and students may leave for lunch. Students are welcome to eat and sit in the cafeteria, tables in the atrium, picnic tables and some students may choose to eat in their cars.

ODY- Students will eat lunch from 11:30 until Noon. Classes will be released to the cafeteria by kitchen staff in a staggered fashion. Students will be free to eat in the lunchroom, classrooms and around campus as usual.

Are buildings allowing volunteers into buildings this school year?

Winn- Limited use of volunteers. We will allow volunteers that are doing something educational with students (EX: speaker). We will encourage our volunteers to mask as they work with our cohorted students.

SES- Limited use of volunteers at this time.

SMS- Limited use of volunteers at this time.

SHS- Limited use of volunteers.

ODY- Limited use of volunteers.

**MDHHS prevention strategies in schools include:
(THESE ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY.)**

1. Promoting COVID-19 vaccination [for eligible staff and students](#).
2. Correctly and consistently using [well-fitted masks](#) that cover the nose and mouth. CDC recommendations for [when to wear a mask in school settings](#).
3. Social Distancing - [Physical distancing](#), including cohorting children together to reduce potential exposures.
4. COVID-19 Screening, Testing and Contact Tracing
 - Encouraging students and staff to stay home if sick or having [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
 - Encouraging students and staff to get tested for COVID-19 if having [symptoms](#) or if they are not fully vaccinated and are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19.

- Conducting [screening](#).
 - Implementing [contact tracing](#) and quarantine, collaborating with the local health department.
5. Maintaining Healthy Environments
- Promoting [handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes](#).
 - Routine [cleaning](#) to help maintain healthy facilities.
 - Avoiding crowded and/or poorly ventilated indoor activities (e.g., engaging in outdoor activities when possible and increasing [ventilation](#) for indoor activities).

For further information about ALL COVID-19 matters and local updates, click on this link: <https://www.cmdhd.org/novelschools>.

Additionally, as a district, we have secured a number of safety protocol measures to increase the health and safety of our children. In our buildings - in all high volume capacity spaces - (for example, offices, media centers, Choir/Band rooms, etc.) there will be air purification portable units. Installed inside our larger ventilation units and systems district-wide will be UltraViolet air purification systems.

Thank you, Bluejay staff and families, for your attention to this message. The best we can do at this time is “our best.” Whether you can appreciate the messaging in this communication or not, please know we care about you, we value you and hope your family and you remain safe and healthy. All the best to us all this coming school year!

Sincerely,

Terry J. Starr, Superintendent