



PROJECT RESTART FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated Jan. 22, 2021

As school divisions and other large businesses across the country have seen during the last 10 months, information about COVID-19 and guidance related to operations and health precautions during the pandemic change frequently.

Chesterfield County Public Schools and the Chesterfield County School Board realize that changing public health guidance, and alterations to academic plans made as a result, can be confusing for stakeholders, frustrating for personal schedules and disruptive to life in general. We appreciate the patience, grace and understanding that has been extended to our school division since mid-March. As we all are aware, this international pandemic was not started by any school division in our country; nor was it started by any family that we served. Yet we all must react to it and continue to do the best we can within the confines of scientific and public health guidance that are provided.

This document continues our efforts to be responsive to the most frequently asked questions submitted to the school division after the Jan. 12, 2021 decision to return elementary school students to an in-person learning environment for the start of the third marking period (Feb. 1, 2021). This document will be updated and reposted as additional thematic questions are received. Families are encouraged to check this document often for updates.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Where did the 3 feet of social distancing referenced in the School Board presentation come from?

The school division continues to rely on social distancing guidance as provided by various local, state and federal entities. These include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI), and the

Chesterfield County Risk Management Department. In addition, we have watched as other school divisions have reopened successfully while incorporating guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In classrooms, while seated, students in desks or at tables will be set up a minimum of 3 feet apart. The distance will be measured from the edge of a desk to the next desk. When a room is larger and can accommodate increased distance between students, or when the number of students in a classroom allows for more distance, this distance may be increased.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended layers of protection in schools “include keeping desks at least 3 feet apart, and ideally 6 feet apart; cohorting students, using outdoor spaces when possible; promoting hand and cough hygiene and increasing cleaning and disinfection of facilities.”

Guidance from the CDC continues to suggest 6 feet social distancing “when feasible” or “if possible,” and talks about mitigation strategies to use when 6 feet is not doable. The VDH also references 6 feet distance “when possible.”

Guidance from the local Risk Management team includes that in areas where the community transmission of COVID-19 is more substantial, distancing of at least 6 feet will need to be strongly considered; this guidance may be subject to change as we learn more. Therefore, in school settings schools are encouraged to aim for 6 feet of physical distance to the greatest extent possible; however, if 6 feet of distance is not feasible (inclusive of buildings and school buses), schools should implement a combination of face coverings and a minimum of 3 feet distance between everyone present.

Schools around the Richmond-metro area that have successfully reopened report using 3 feet of social distancing in the classroom.

SCHOOL REOPENING

Why are we considering reopening schools to in-person instruction when positive case counts are at all-time highs?

We have continued to follow public health recommendations and research related to safely reopening schools during this pandemic. The Virginia Department of Health has stated that schools should prioritize the re-entry of younger students when planning to reopen schools. The Harvard Global Health Institute, whose metrics were used to stop in-person instruction in

November 2020, has moved away from a target number of case counts and has shared that reopening should be based on a school division's ability to deliver infection control.

The school division operated in a hybrid learning environment with mitigation strategies that worked during the Fall. With limited community spread in schools during that time and solid mitigation efforts, the school division believes it can continue to welcome students back to an in-person learning environment.

TRANSPORTATION

Will students still sit one or two people to a seat?

Students will sit one to a seat, with several exceptions:

- Siblings will be allowed to sit together.
- In unique circumstances, students may have to sit two to a seat if not doing so meant that some students at later bus stops would be left at the bus stop. In this case, the Transportation Department will work expeditiously to redo bus routes to accommodate the number of students on the bus.

Will windows be lowered to increase air circulation?

Yes, as allowed with weather, windows will be lowered slightly to increase air circulation. Students are encouraged to wear coats or extra layers while on the bus during the winter.

MAINTENANCE

What has the school division done to enhance airflow in classrooms?

A recent study of each school was conducted with regard to air quality and filters.

This independent study by engineering consultant Dewberry included two phases that helped provide guidance with the placement of filters and areas for system enhancements. When queried as a follow-up to the study, Dewberry indicated that 4-6 changes per hour (ACH) rate can be achieved through outside air controls (like damper adjustments) and filtration coordination. At the same time, it is essential to maintain efforts at each school location with filter replacement and managing systems to support this outcome.

In addition, these enhancements have been made:

- Conducted quarterly HVAC preventive maintenance inspections and repairs, including filter replacement
- Continued biocide treatment (kills Legionella and other agents) of our cooling towers, along with summer testing (multiple cooling towers were replaced)
- Upgraded filters to MERV-13 (complete at 61 schools, partially complete at remaining schools)
- Completed an engineering study regarding HVAC design to ventilation standards at all schools and testing to determine effectiveness and potential upgrades at schools with systems designed to meet codes in effect before the current ASHRAE standards were promulgated (funded by CARES)
- Issued \$57 million in bonds through the county government supports funding for CCPS major maintenance projects; HVAC systems will have a top priority as these projects are planned and executed
- Replaced multiple chillers and boilers; the School Board recently approved contracts to replace water-source heat pump systems at four elementary schools, along with a contract to replace the primary chiller at a high school and three elementary schools
- Procured and distributed 3,480 air purifiers with HEPA filtration (funded by CARES); based on the engineering study cited above, these systems were distributed to every classroom at schools with HVAC systems that were not designed to the latest specifications recommended by ASHRAE (17 schools have newer HVAC systems designed to meet the ASHRAE specifications, so those schools did not receive air purifiers for every classroom)
- Placed purifiers in all schools' clinics and modular trailers

Will every single school have the proper ventilation to achieve 4-6 air changes per hour?

From the Dewberry report referenced above: "The 4-6 air changes per hour (ACH) can be achieved through outside air (OA) ventilation, filtration, or a combination. Even if the airflow rates of the filtration units the County bought do not equate to the 4-6 ACH, you may still be able to meet this requirement if you factor in OA ventilation. Most classrooms should already be mechanically producing (or capable of) 4-6 ACH per hour simply to heat and cool the space. By improving filtration (to a level not specified by Harvard, MERV-13 by ASHRAE), or through the use of bi-polar or UV, there is a high likelihood CCPS will satisfy or already satisfies 4-6 ACH of 'clean' air with existing equipment."

Will there be pandemic mitigation teams working with schools to make sure that proper mitigation strategies are enforced? Will you be providing a team to surprise visit schools -- specifically classrooms, bathrooms, etc. -- to ensure mitigation strategies are being followed?

Yes, the school division is creating school-based teams and Central Office teams to monitor mitigation strategies.

CAFETERIAS

Will breakfast and lunch continue to be offered for free?

Yes, the federal government has made all breakfast and lunch meals free for all students (regardless of income) for the remainder of the school year.

Will breakfast and lunch still be served in the cafeteria?

Many schools implemented breakfast kiosks, allowing students to pick up their free breakfasts and eat them in the classroom. These kiosks will remain in place at schools. Students will continue to safely social distance while waiting to pick up their meals.

Lunch will still be distributed through the cafeteria. Students will continue to follow the same safety procedures that they did when hybrid learning was in place. Students will be socially distanced while waiting in line, will be given hand sanitizer before entering the serving line area, will be given lunch served in a clamshell and will then sit and eat in the cafeteria or in their classroom.

Will students sit 3 feet apart in the cafeteria?

UPDATE: No, per Risk Management recommendation, students will remain 6 feet apart in the cafeteria as they were in the fall when in-person learning occurred.

ASYNCHRONOUS WEDNESDAYS

Why were asynchronous Wednesdays removed from the calendar at the secondary level? These days gave me time to work with my teacher, catch up on my school work, earn extra work hours at my job, etc.

The current decision revolved around two main points:

- The first had to do with instructional time and, as the second semester started, attempting to adjust this to support additional instruction for all students.

- The second area was a desire to align the virtual and in-person formats with each other as the school division looks to reopen the option at secondary like they have for elementary students (who restart on February 1 with this in-person option).

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

If a student learning in person has to quarantine due to a possible exposure, how will they receive their education? Will that class be streamed or will the teacher move to a virtual classroom?

Schools will ensure that quarantined students will maintain their instruction and connections to the classroom teacher just as they would if they missed school for other medical reasons.

If a student has to quarantine, will the entire class move to a virtual learning environment for two weeks? Or will they still report to school and meet the teacher online while being monitored by another staff member?

This is a perfect example of a situation that would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis using the information that is available in each specific situation.

For example, how many students in the class have been quarantined? If a large number of students have been quarantined in addition to the teacher, it may make sense to move the class to a temporary all-virtual learning environment.

If a teacher can teach effectively while out of school on quarantine and the school can find a staff member or substitute to be present with the class, then the teacher may teach virtually while the students learn in-person.

Why are elementary school students returning first?

The rationale that the school division has continued to use with having elementary return ahead of secondary is similar to what was used when developing the initial cohorts. Younger students are seen as having greater challenges with the instructional modality of virtual over older students. Younger students also consistently are identified (by VDH, VDOE, etc.) as the first students who should be reintroduced into the in-person learning environment.

Why are you requiring that families make a decision for the remainder of the school year instead of just for the third marking period?

The rationale that was provided as to why decisions made now may need to remain in place for the remainder of the school year are related to this desire for stability. One of the pieces of feedback that we heard through the various focus groups that we held was the need for continuity. Making a decision for the remainder of the school year will allow for that.

With each change that provides new options for families also comes with the risk of disrupting student schedules and teacher assignments to accommodate these choices. For example, each change requires school-based administration to redo class rosters. This change could mean a new teacher, a larger class, etc. Some students already have had multiple teachers during this school year. Allowing a family the opportunity to make one decision about the second semester prior to the third marking period will limit the number of required class roster changes in the future. This will bring about consistency and continuity, and will better support the student-teacher relationship.

At this time, we are not in a position for the second half of the year to guarantee that changes can take place so, as a result, we cannot in good conscience suggest parents wait-and-see if space or new opportunities arise.

As always, families may wish to discuss a specific situation with the principal at their child's school.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL LEVELS

Why aren't these students eligible to return to in-person learning at the start of the second semester like their elementary school counterparts?

While some secondary groups are returned in this initial phase (students at the Career and Technical Centers, alternative school students in Academy 360 at the middle school level), a staged-return approach allows for a full operational focus to be provided for our youngest students and their return to school setting.

The School Board has set a date of February 9 for their next School Board business meeting. At that time all information will be reviewed to help determine a timeline for when larger numbers of secondary students will be returned to in-person instructional options at the high school and middle school level.

CONTACT TRACING, QUARANTINES AND CLOSURES

What is the contact tracing process?

The school division's practice with contact tracing after the identification of a positive case has been designed around both CDC guidelines and VDH guidance.

Each school principal or school nurse communicates any case within an established team protocol. This report includes an initial review of potential close contacts. The school division's nursing supervisor then works in tandem with the local health department to report and track cases. The school administrator contacts potential close contacts, advising them of the situation, and shares the need to quarantine. The health department follows up as needed.

Won't contact tracing become more difficult and the number of quarantines increase as students are closer together?

The contact tracing process will remain the same, but we would expect to see an increase in the number of student quarantines since more people would be within the 6 feet range, as identified in the VDH close contact definition.

The school division will monitor quarantines as a potential decision point for when to return a specific classroom to virtual learning or when to close a school.

Will you be considering school-by-school closures vs. divisionwide closures?

Moving forward, barring any change in direction at the state or federal levels, we expect to continue to monitor COVID on a case-by-case, classroom-by-classroom, school-by-school basis. Decisions about closing classrooms and/or a school will be made based on community spread within and/or our ability to appropriately staff and operate a school.

VACCINATIONS

Why not return students to school after all staff members have been vaccinated?

The Virginia Department of Health has said that even in areas with the highest rates of community transmission (such as Chesterfield County), it is appropriate to bring back a school division's youngest learners. The Harvard Global Health Institute also has provided infection control measures that indicate school divisions should be able to meet prior to reopening; these do not include the complete vaccination of all staff.

Will vaccinations be required of all staff members?

No, there is no state or federal requirement that staff members are vaccinated.

If you have been vaccinated, do you need to be quarantined if exposed?

The answer we received from the Chesterfield Health District is that, at this time, fully vaccinated individuals are still being quarantined after close contact with a positive individual. Rationale given included that it is unknown at this time if vaccinated individuals are still able to spread the virus.

MISCELLANEOUS

This decision feels rushed and caught people by surprise. Why could we not have waited longer?

It was stated at the November 2020 School Board meeting that the School Board would make a decision about plans for the second semester at its Jan. 12 business meeting. As such, the school division continued to track data, changes/updates to recommendations and review how other school divisions had successfully reopened schools for smaller numbers of students. All of that was accomplished.

Perhaps the biggest change from November 2020 to January 2021 was the change in guidance from the Harvard Global Health Institute, whose recommendations and guidance had been considered and used while planning the beginning of the school year.

In “Schools and the Path to Zero: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces,” the HGHI team wrote: “In July, we published guidance for school leaders making decisions about school re-openings that offered a tiered structure for thinking about risk at different levels of community spread. We recommended that schools be closed when the average daily case rate rose about 25 cases/100,000 people at the county level. Since July, our scientific understanding of COVID has increased significantly, as has our understanding of degrees of risk in schools, and we can now recommend that schools be open even at the very high levels of spread we are now seeing, provided that they strictly implement strategies of infection control.”

This 25 cases/100,000 residents metric was what we used in November 2020 to close schools and return to a virtual learning environment. With this metric now voided and with successful mitigation strategies in place, we were in a position to successfully return students to school.

Has Chesterfield County Public Schools been monitoring how other school divisions have successfully reopened? Conversely, has Chesterfield County Public Schools listened to why other school divisions have chosen not to reopen?

We do monitor the surrounding divisions and actions they take (from Richmond/Henrico who have made no attempt to return students this year to Hanover/Powhatan who have had students in classes since September), as well as information from other divisions across the state.

In turn, we have also worked with both our County Risk Management staff and our local health department staff (in collaboration with VDH) as the division has reviewed and made decisions and each plan.

One difference between CCPS and school divisions who have chosen not to reopen yet is that we already have experience with reopening. We did have a successful reopening for Cohort Nos. 1-4 in the fall. Returning to an all-virtual learning setting in November 2020 was not a sign of failure in terms of reopening; rather, it was aligned with the public health metrics we were following at that time.