



From: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>
Date: August 4, 2021 at 20:00:48 MDT
To: MCPS Staff <mcpsstaff@mcpsmt.org>
Subject: Opening letter to MCPS Families, Updated Guidance

Wednesday, August 4

Hello MCPS Education Team,

I hope that everyone is having a well deserved break and has time to spend with family and friends.

I know that many of you have questions and interest in what this school year will look like. I appreciate your patience as we work through the latest school guidance from the CDC and other organizations. Much of the guidance was not released until late July.

Below is an email that we will be sending to all families on Thursday, August 5. I wanted you to have a chance to see everything before it went to our families.

You will note that the Face Covering guidelines are still in Draft. Those guidelines will be discussed at our next Board meeting, August 10. It will be a virtual meeting and the link to the meeting will be posted on our website.

As you look over the information, you may have further questions regarding what this means for your classroom as you plan for the year. Please know that Vinny and Brooke are working diligently on getting all the COVID protocols updated for the year and we will release specific classroom guidelines for staff that should help answer many of your questions. Thanks for your patience.

I am really looking forward to getting to see everyone again in the coming weeks. Thanks for all you have done for our students and our families during the past 18 months. Rob

Dear MCPS Families:

Thank you for your interest and questions related to the COVID Reopening Plan for Missoula County Public Schools for the 2021-22 school year. Also, thank you for your patience as we finalized our plan with the latest local and national guidance. In revising the phase 3 plan for the upcoming year our COVID task force remained focused on the safety and welfare of our students, staff and community. You can find the full Phase 3 Reopen Plan [HERE](#).

While we know there continue to be risks related to possible transmission of the COVID-19 virus, we are reflecting on what we have learned about this pandemic over the past year to manage that risk, balance the need for mitigation strategies

with the educational needs of students, and forge ahead with recovery efforts. I would like to share relevant details and strategies listed below related to how we intend to operate our schools in the coming months.

Mitigation Strategies

We will continue to work with the health department to trace, identify and notify close contacts to all positive COVID cases associated with MCPS. New guidance from the CDC should greatly reduce the number of students considered close contacts, if universal face coverings are used. We will also continue with cleaning procedures, maintenance of our ventilation systems, and enhanced hand hygiene practices.

Classrooms will operate much like they did in pre-COVID times, while maintaining 3 feet or as much as possible between students or groups, while implementing other mitigation strategies.

We will continue to ask that families keep their students home if they are ill, particularly if they are unvaccinated for COVID-19. Testing will be available to all students and staff via MCPS or the Missoula City-County Health Department. A reminder of our family guidance for keeping a child home [here](#).

MCPS will update staff and families on vaccination eligibility and opportunities for 5-11 year-olds and encourage all vaccine-eligible students and staff to consider getting vaccinated, if it is right for you and your family.

DRAFT Face Covering Guidelines

Please note: These guidelines will need to be reviewed and approved by our Board of Trustees. This discussion will occur at the Board meeting on August 10, which starts at 6pm. The meeting will be virtual, on zoom. Please check our website for the zoom link to the meeting. You can also watch the meeting on MCAT. The Board will take verbal public comment over zoom before a final decision is made. You may also provide written comments for the Board to consider, using the following email address: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org.

DRAFT

MCPS Face Covering Guidelines and Requirements

As of August 16, 2021, until further notice, to be reviewed after the first 6 weeks of school.

The following guidelines will be followed in all PreK-12 MCPS Facilities as well as Administrative Offices.

While indoors and while on MCPS transportation (Beach or other):

- Face coverings are required for all students, staff and volunteers or guests, regardless of vaccination status.
- Face coverings are not required when outdoors.
- Face coverings are not required while eating/drinking.
- In some circumstances, staff may lower face covering while teaching, presenting, speaking or providing directions as long as they can maintain appropriate distance (6ft) from others. This decision will be left to the discretion of the individual staff member. However, face coverings should be used when working with small groups or individual students.
- When working alone, not with students or not with members of the public, staff may remove face coverings.
- To be determined by Staff, there may be opportunities for students for routine “mask breaks” throughout the day, if appropriate distancing can be maintained.
- For details regarding face coverings (types and proper use), MCPS follows the CDC guidance titled: “[Your Guide to Masks](#).”

These guidelines will remain in effect for *at least* the first 6 weeks of school and will be routinely reviewed by Administration, COVID task force and Board of Trustees. These guidelines may be modified, reduced or extended. Factors that will be used in decision making include, but are not limited to, local incident rate (new cases, per 100,000, 7 day rolling average), local vaccination rate by age group, and district data related to school associated positive COVID cases and/or transmission.

RATIONALE

As provided by MT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC and MCCHD.

- Children younger than 12 years do not have the opportunity to be vaccinated, and will not likely have this opportunity until late fall/early winter.
- CDC guidance regarding who is determined to be a close contact has changed to acknowledge the use of face coverings in K-12 settings. Last school year, any student within 6 feet of a positive case would be considered a “close contact” and would have to quarantine, 10-14 days. This school year, if *both* the positive case and other students are correctly and consistently using face coverings, the other students may not be considered close contacts and may not have to quarantine.
- The Delta variant of this virus has now been detected in Montana, and this variant has been found to be much more contagious as well as even cause mild disease in vaccinated people. Cases and hospitalizations are increasing from earlier this month, and the Delta variant is rapidly becoming the predominant variant in Montana.

School Schedule

Families can access our updated school schedule on our district website [here](#).

The new school hours for the 2021-2022 school day will be as follows:

- **Elementary K-5:** 8:15 a.m. - 3:15 p.m. (Common dismissal for all K-5)
 - Thursday Early Out 2:30 p.m.
- **Middle School 6-8:** 7:50 a.m. - 2:45 p.m.
 - Thursday Early Out 2:00 p.m.
- **High School 9-12:** 8:55 a.m. - 3:55 p.m.
 - Thursday: Late Start 9:40 a.m./Released at 3:55 p.m.

Busing

Buses will run on the regular school schedule as outlined above. You can review busing locations on infofinder on our district website [here](#).

Extracurricular Activities

MCPS will continue to collaborate with our local and state health departments, the Montana High School Association (MHSA) and our building administrators to ensure we are following appropriate and safe health protocols for extra-curricular activities. Families will be updated with pertinent health information, schedule changes, and practice-competition updates when available.

Family feedback and information

If you would like to provide public comment for our Board of Trustees regarding the face covering guidelines or any other COVID protocol, please use the following email: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org . If you have COVID-19 related questions regarding our phase 3 reopening, you can email our district team at covidquestions@mcpsmt.org. We will do our best to respond in a timely manner.

Thanks again for your patience.

Rob Watson, EdD
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Missoula County Public Schools

Brooke Krininger, MPH, BSN, RN, CPAN
Missoula County Public Schools
Health Services Supervisor

Vinny Giammona
COVID Recovery Coordinator
Missoula County Public Schools

Links to COVID Guidance and Data:

Local

[COVID Data: MCCHD](#) - Updated Daily

[Statement from MCCHD regarding use of face coverings](#) - July 27, 2021

State

[Letter from MT Acad of Pediatricians](#) - July 27, 2021

[Memo from State Supt, OPI](#) - May 18, 2021

[DPHHS Summary COVID Data](#) - July 2, 2021

National

[CDC Guidelines](#) - July 9 and updated July 27

[American Academy of Pediatrics: School Guidelines](#), July 20, 2021

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