Frequently Asked Questions About Our 2021 Reopening Plan

Q: Will you require evidence of vaccination for students?

We will not be requiring evidence of vaccination for students, but we will be asking families to voluntarily share that information in a survey later this week. Knowing vaccination status will have a direct impact on quarantining if a positive case is identified in school. Following a potential exposure, anyone vaccinated does not have to quarantine, but will have to monitor symptoms.

Q: What percentage of staff are vaccinated and do they have to participate in weekly testing?

96.5% of the entire staff is vaccinated. Those who are not yet vaccinated will participate in weekly testing.

Q: Is the Westhill reopening plan in place for the entire school year?

The Westhill reopening plan is a living document, meaning that we will make adjustments along the way. Our primary focus is on keeping our students and staff safe AND to keep our students in school and in-person five days per week. Any changes that we make along the way will be made with thoughtful consideration and will be communicated. It is our hope that we continue to offer our students all of the experiences that they would have in a typical school year.

Q: What does seating on buses look like this year for students?

As mentioned in the reopening plan, all students and Westhill staff are required to wear a mask while riding district transportation. There was no evidence of transmission of the virus in school or on school buses last year. Masks are the primary mitigation factor to minimize transmission. With masks on, students will be sitting two to a seat in most cases.

Q: If a student stays home sick from school, do they need to provide a note or negative COVID test to return to school? What if the symptoms are not COVID related?

Yes, individuals who are absent from school or sent home with COVID symptoms will need to provide proof of a negative COVID test (PCR test) in order to return to class. Those symptoms include:
- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

If symptoms are not COVID related, a note or explanation is required to return to school. Examples include an ear infection, injury, etc.

Q: Will you be using plexiglass barriers in classrooms and cafeterias?

Some studies suggest that barriers don't help minimize the spread of the virus and probably give people a false sense of security. In some cases, the barriers can make things worse if they impede normal air flow and ventilation. Our primary mitigation factors are masks and social distancing. In a setting like the cafeteria, each building will utilize barriers if the layout of the room and air filtration systems suggest their use would be effective. Right now, we are planning on using them at Walberta Park, Cherry Road and Onondaga Hill Middle School. These buildings also represent a large portion of our population that is not eligible to be vaccinated at this time. We will monitor and adjust as the year evolves.

Q: How long will contacts of positive COVID-19 cases be required to quarantine?

Individuals who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 will be required to quarantine for 10 days from the date they were last exposed if they are not vaccinated. Fully vaccinated people who have been exposed do NOT have to quarantine unless they have symptoms (see this flowchart from Onondaga County Health department for details), but are recommended to get a COVID test 3 to 5 days after exposure. Those who are placed in quarantine will receive an official quarantine order. After stopping quarantine, individuals should:

- Watch for symptoms until 14 days after exposure.
- If symptoms develop, immediately self-isolate and contact the Health Department at 315.435.3236.
- Wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, wash hands, avoid crowds, and take other steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Q: If a contact is tested during the 10 day quarantine period and is found to be negative, does the quarantine end early?

Contacts must remain in quarantine for the full duration listed on the initial quarantine order in case symptoms develop. They cannot "test out" early.

Q: How does pooled testing work? How is it different from diagnostic testing?

The Westhill Central School District will partner with Onondaga County to provide voluntary COVID screening and diagnostic testing for staff and students. Randomized saliva pool testing will take place throughout the County, including Westhill. When saliva pool testing is conducted, groups of 10-12 saliva samples are collected from students and staff to detect the presence of COVID. The testing sample will be performed by an appropriately trained individual and the sample will be obtained by rubbing a swab inside of the mouth on the inside of each cheek and under the tongue. Testing samples will be pooled together to help expedite processing time. Onondaga County should have results within 24 hours. In the event that a pool test yields a positive result, all individuals in that pool would be required to isolate until the specific sample that tested positive is identified. Within 12 hours of the notification of a positive test in the pool, the positive case should be identified and the others parties will be allowed ro return to school. It appears that a student could potentially miss one day or part of a day of school if they are in a positive pool, but actually negative themselves. COVID screening testing will be conducted on a voluntary basis when made available by Onondaga County.

Diagnostic testing is testing done individually for a specific student with the results tied just to that individual. Diagnostic testing is typically done when an individual has symptoms.

A universal consent form will be sent home for families to decide whether they would like their child(ren) to participate in diagnostic testing, pooled testing, or both. Students are not required to participate in testing.