



**Westhill Central School District  
School Reopening Plan  
August 2021**

Dear Westhill Central School District Community:

We are pleased to share with you our reopening plan for the 2021-2022 school year. It is exciting to have all of our schools welcoming our students for five days a week of in-person instruction.

Throughout the pandemic Westhill has pulled together to meet the needs of our students and school community. When schools were closed by state officials in March 2020, Westhill quickly shifted gears to remote learning. Our food service and transportation departments worked together to deliver meals and learning materials to students. Our teachers, teaching assistants, school counselors, psychologists, administrators, supervisors, and clerical staff worked tirelessly to meet the learning needs of our students.

We appreciate the support, trust, and cooperation of our students and families to operate schools safely during the pandemic. We have all given up a lot this past year, but as you review this reopening plan hopefully you will see that school activities are looking much more like they did pre-Pandemic.

There are a few important safety precautions that we will need to take such as wearing a mask when inside school buildings, washing our hands, and staying home when you are sick or have symptoms. The safety precautions outlined in this reopening plan were created by reviewing recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [guidance from the New York State Education Department](#) in conjunction with guidance from state and local health officials.

We are grateful for the support of our community leaders, board of education, administrators and supervisors, school staff, public health officials, and school community.

We are hopeful that as conditions improve locally we will be able to revisit some of these safety precautions. We appreciate all that our students, families, and staff members have done and will continue to do to keep everyone safe as we move into the new school year.

Please be sure to review this updated Reopening Plan and contact your building principal with any specific questions or concerns regarding your child and the start of the school year.

Thank you again for your continued support of our students and staff.

Sincerely,

Stephen R, Dunham  
Superintendent of Schools

## **COVID 19 Prevention Strategies Most Important for Safe In-Person Learning in K-12 Schools**

### **1. Promoting Vaccination**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, “vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic.” The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages all eligible individuals to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Westhill CSD encourages all eligible staff, students, and community members to discuss the COVID-19 vaccines with their primary care provider and consider getting vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available for eligible individuals ages 12 and up. For information on how to obtain a COVID vaccine, you can visit - <https://covid19.ongov.net/vaccine/> Vaccines can be obtained at NYS vaccination locations, county locations, or retail pharmacies.

We will continue to work with our partners at the Onondaga County Health Department and are interested in scheduling vaccine clinics when students younger than 12 are deemed eligible for the vaccine.

To learn more about vaccination, visit [vaccines.gov](https://vaccines.gov).

### **2. Consistent and Correct Mask Use**

Currently the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that teachers, staff, and students consistently and correctly wear a mask when indoors. The CDC recommends indoor masking for all individuals aged 2 years and older, including students, teachers, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. In outdoor settings, students, staff, and visitors do not need to wear a mask; however, individuals who are not fully vaccinated should consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings.

The Westhill Central School District will require all students, staff, and visitors to wear a mask when inside of school buildings or school vehicles occupied by students, except when eating or drinking. Mask breaks will be scheduled at various intervals throughout the school day. Exceptions to the indoor mask wearing policy will be considered on a case by case basis for individuals who cannot wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act or in cases where wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace safety. Individuals will not be required to wear a mask when participating in outdoor activities.

When students are riding on school vehicles, all drivers and passengers are required to wear a mask at all times.

Masks will be provided for those individuals who forget to bring a mask. Masks are available in the main office, nurses office, and on school vehicles.

The district will continue to monitor transmission rates in the surrounding community and consult with the Onondaga County Health Department and state officials on the mask wearing policy. We are hopeful that when conditions in the surrounding community improve, that the mask wearing policy can be revisited.

### **3. Physical Distancing**

The Onondaga County Health Department recommends that schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms in combination with indoor mask wearing to reduce transmission risk.

The Centers for Disease Control also recommends that schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to the extent possible within their structures, combined with indoor mask wearing to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The CDC recommends physical distancing of six feet between individuals who are not fully vaccinated; however, the CDC also denotes several studies from the 2020-2021 school year that show low COVID-19 transmission levels in schools when other mitigation measures are in place, such as the use of masks - [click here](#).

Westhill Central School District will encourage students to maintain a minimum distance of at least three feet during classroom activities. Given the large number of students returning for in person instruction, physical distancing is not always attainable in school cafeterias or on school vehicles. During meal periods, students will be allowed to remove their mask when eating or drinking. Once a student has finished eating or drinking, students will be asked to resume wearing a face mask.

The district will increase other mitigation measures when physical distancing cannot be attained, such as improving fresh air flow by opening windows and cohorting elementary age students who are not currently eligible for the vaccine.

### **4. Screening Testing**

The Centers for Disease Control defines screening testing as identifying people, including those with or without symptoms (or before development of symptoms) who may be contagious, so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission. The CDC recommends that schools offer screening testing for students who are not fully vaccinated at least once per week in areas of high transmission. In August 2021, Onondaga County was identified as an area with a [high level of community transmission](#).

The Westhill Central School District will partner with Onondaga County to provide voluntary COVID screening and diagnostic testing for staff and students. Onondaga County is the recipient of a grant from the New York State Department of Health related to conducting routine surveillance testing in public schools. The current plan for screening testing as described by

Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta is to conduct randomized saliva pool testing in school buildings. 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 is hoping to have results returned 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. COVID screening testing will be conducted on a voluntary basis when made available by Onondaga County. Additional information, including parental consent forms, will be sent to parents when made available by Onondaga County.

## **5. Ventilation**

The Centers for Disease Control notes that improving ventilation is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy that can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. The CDC encourages improving ventilation by bringing fresh outdoor air into the building by opening windows, making changes to the HVAC or filtration systems.

Maintenance personnel regularly performed inspections of our HVAC systems and change air filters twice a year with the highest grade MERV 13 filters that do not reduce air flow to the unit. Our HVAC contractor has checked all outside air dampers for proper operation and set operating functions according to temperature.

## **6. Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

Classroom teachers will emphasize the importance of proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette. The CDC notes that schools should monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate hand washing supplies. Custodians will monitor bathroom and classroom sinks to make sure that faucets are functioning correctly and are regularly cleaned and sanitized. Students will be reminded to wash their hands regularly, especially before or after meal periods or after using the restroom. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer stations are available at various locations throughout the school and in classrooms.

## **7. Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested**

In accordance with CDC guidance, students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness (influenza or COVID-19), should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for evaluation care and testing. Individuals who are absent from school will need to provide proof of a negative COVID test (PCR test only) in order to return to class.

Students or staff members who develop symptoms during the school day will be sent home immediately. Parents of students will be contacted immediately to come and pick up their child and should contact their healthcare provider for evaluation and a possible COVID-19 test.

The Onondaga County Health Department is working on the accessibility of symptomatic COVID testing at local schools with parental consent. When this testing is made available, parents will be provided with additional information on the process for testing symptomatic students.

The district will send out reminders on a routine basis on the importance of staying home when sick and on the symptoms of COVID 19 which 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

The district will not be asking students and staff to fill out a daily health questionnaire and the district will not be taking student temperatures when students arrive at school. The [CDC also noted the limited effectiveness](#) in symptom screening and “does not currently recommend routine (such as daily) school-based COVID-19 symptom screening of all students.” It should be noted that students should not attend school when they are sick.

## **8. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine**

The district will continue to work with Onondaga County and NYS Department of Health representatives to complete all contact tracing and assist with notifying individuals who should monitor symptoms, isolate, or quarantine based on guidance from the local health department. The most recent guidelines on contact tracing and quarantine/isolation is dated February 16, 2021 and the district will continue to seek updated guidance from the local health department - [click here](#).

The district will report new diagnoses of COVID-19 to the local health department and submit associated contact tracing data upon request. It should be noted that any formal notice of quarantine is the responsibility of the local health department. The district will also contact families of students when exposures occur that may require symptom monitoring, quarantine or isolation.

## **9. Cleaning and Disinfection**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, daily cleaning and disinfection is usually sufficient to remove viral particles and germs from surfaces. The district will follow standard practices and

procedures for school cleaning, which include a cleaning of classrooms and disinfecting high contact surfaces each evening after school hours. [Here is a link to our standard cleaning and disinfection practices.](#)

## **Additional Considerations**

### **Student Attendance**

School principals and nurses will continue to monitor student attendance. Schools will encourage regular on-time attendance and identify strategies and supports to assist students who are struggling with school attendance.

### **Social/Emotional/Mental Health Needs**

Westhill CSD will continue to keep in touch with students, caregivers and parents regarding social, emotional, and mental health needs. The emotional impact on students during the pandemic has been significant. The district is using federal grant funds to secure additional staff to help address the social, emotional, and mental health needs of our students. All students will be screened and monitored throughout the school year to ensure we are providing enough support.

### **Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs**

Westhill CSD is committed to the safety of all students and staff. The district will provide accommodations, modifications, and assistance when implementing COVID-19 safety protocols. This may mean that approaches, strategies, and safety precautions may need to be adjusted for individual students or staff members based on their specific needs.

For students with documented medical needs, the district has partnered with OCM BOCES to offer a fully remote learning option.

Given the focus on returning as many students as possible to the classroom, Westhill teachers will not be live streaming lessons to students learning from home. For students who may be quarantined due to an exposure, we will support students in a variety of ways on a case by case basis depending on their individual situation.

### **Visitors**

The district will continue to review and reevaluate visitor access during the pandemic. Last school year, we were successful in welcoming parents and spectators back for outdoor athletic events and smaller audiences for indoor events. As scheduled events approach, we will communicate important safety information to parents/caregivers and spectators.

We will work with the local health department to develop protocols to welcome a limited number of spectators for indoor sporting events. The district will work with Section III and our league to

determine appropriate safety protocols for welcoming spectators at indoor sporting events. For outdoor sporting events, students, staff, families, and community members are welcome to attend.

For all school visitors, please be sure to stay home when you are sick and seek medical care, regardless of vaccination status.

### **Emergency Closures**

The district will announce on major television stations and local media when schools are closed due to inclement weather, loss of utilities or other unforeseen circumstances. The district will continue to observe traditional “snow days” so long as the district does not exhaust the six emergency closing days built into the school calendar. This means that all schools will be closed and no transportation services will be provided during emergency closing days.

In the event that schools are closed by local, state or officials due to a spread of disease or lack of available staffing resources, schools may have to shift to remote learning. Classroom teachers should be prepared to switch to remote learning quickly. In the event that schools are closed for in person learning, students will be expected to login from home and follow their normal school schedule via video conferencing tools and online learning platforms provided by the district.

### **Food Service and School Meals**

Westhill CSD students can receive meals at no cost throughout the school year based on recent news from the United States Department of Agriculture. However, it is still important for families that may need some assistance with the cost of lunch to complete this [Westhill Food Service Form](#). Having accurate information regarding the economic need in our community opens the door for additional funding opportunities for programs for all of our students.

Regarding meal preparation, staff should wear a mask during meal preparation and service. Students should wear masks when moving through the food service line and cafeteria.

According to the CDC, “students should not be excluded from in person learning to keep a minimum distance, including meal times.” Given the large number of students returning to school for in person instruction, physical distance during meal periods is limited to the size of our cafeteria. When possible, based on weather conditions and available staff for supervision, schools will allow students to eat outside.

School cafeterias and kitchens will be cleaned and disinfected daily. Schools will promote hand washing before and after eating, after handling garbage, or after using the restroom.

### **Remote Learning**



For students with documented medical needs, the district has partnered with OCM BOCES to offer a fully remote learning option.

Given the focus on returning as many students as possible to the classroom, Westhill teachers will not need to live stream lessons to students learning from home. For students who may be quarantined due to an exposure, we will support students in a variety of ways on a case by case basis depending on their individual situation.

In the event that schools are closed by local, state or officials due to a spread of disease or lack of available staffing resources, schools may have to shift to remote learning. Classroom teachers should be prepared to switch to remote learning quickly. In the event that schools are closed for in person learning, students will be expected to login from home and follow their normal school schedule via video conferencing tools and online learning platforms provided by the district.

### **Transportation**

Pursuant to current CDC guidelines, physical distancing is not required on school buses. Students and drivers will wear a mask at all times when students are on board school vehicles. The district will attempt to seat students by household and clean and disinfect vehicles at the end of each school day. When weather conditions allow, drivers will attempt to increase airflow on school vehicles by opening windows and roof hatches.

### **Recess and Physical Education**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, “people do not need to wear masks when outdoors” for activities such as recess and physical education. Physical education teachers will attempt to maximize outdoor spaces and activities during physical education classes. Parents and caregivers should be sure to dress students appropriately, even during the winter months, for outdoor activities during physical education classes and recess.

During indoor physical education activities, the CDC recommends that masks be worn ~~indoors~~.

### **Sports and Other Extracurricular Activities**

Westhill CSD will work with Section III and our league to develop protocols for safe participation in athletics programs for students. According to the CDC, certain high risk sports remain at increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 due to increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19. Close contact sports and indoor sports are considered high risk.

For indoor sports, the district may increase physical distancing between players on the bench or spectators in the crowd. The district may also reduce capacity for spectators or not allow spectators at indoor sports based on determinations made by state or local authorities.

## **Supports for School Staff Members**

Westhill CSD recognizes the challenges that our school employees face in dealing with the stress of day to day school activities coupled with the additional safety precautions during the pandemic. We are incredibly grateful and proud of the work of our dedicated staff members. Employees who are dealing with personal or family issues can access our Employee Assistance Program by calling 315-471-1361 or 1-800-327-8764, emailing [eap@ocmboces.org](mailto:eap@ocmboces.org) or visiting the program website: <https://www.ocmboces.org/eap>

## **Emergency Operations Plans**

Westhill CSD revised the District Safety Plan to include an appendix related to Pandemic Preparedness. A copy of the final emergency response plan is available on the district website.

## **Vaccination Verification**

The district will work with state and local vaccine providers to encourage vaccination efforts with school employees and students. The district will rely on the local and state health department to determine the vaccination status of individuals who may be considered close contacts of a positive case. Staff members or students who share their vaccination status with the school can be assured that the district will keep this information confidential and secure.

## **School Based Testing**

Westhill Central School District will partner with Onondaga County to provide voluntary COVID screening testing for staff and students. Onondaga County is the recipient of a grant from the New York State Department of Health related to conducting routine surveillance and diagnostic testing in public schools. The current plan for screening testing as described by Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta is to conduct randomized saliva pool testing in school buildings. 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 is hoping to have results returned 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. COVID screening testing will be conducted on a voluntary basis when made available by Onondaga County. Additional information, including parental consent forms, will be sent to parents when made available by Onondaga County.