

Responsible Return to School

To Our Omaha Public Schools Community:

When early August arrives, more than five months will have passed since we last learned with students in-person. We miss our students. We have actively planned for a responsible reopening of our schools throughout the spring and summer. This outline offers more detail about the safety measures and new routines we anticipate in August and beyond.

Our work is guided by three key principles for the community we serve:

- Prioritizing the health and safety of our students, staff and families
- Providing support to our students, families and staff – including their social and emotional needs in this pandemic
- Maximizing learning time for students and enhancing distance engagement through our 1 to 1 technology initiative

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, Nebraska Department of Education, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Douglas County Health Department and more informed our planning. Our team engaged staff, families and students through surveys, focus groups and regular conversations with our labor partners. We have open lines of communication with health experts, our neighboring school districts and fellow large, urban school districts across the country.

We know routines will look different this fall. Smaller student groups, enhanced cleaning measures and protective equipment like masks will be necessary. Health experts tell us masks, especially, are critical to a responsible return in-person. **We know conditions and guidance will evolve.** It is impossible to have an answer for every possibility at this time and our plans will have to adjust, but the work accomplished thus far positions us well for the challenges and opportunities ahead. **We know we cannot achieve this alone.** Accomplishing a responsible return to school requires all of our participation.

In early 2020, Omaha Public Schools launched its new Strategic Plan of Action, outlining our core, collective priorities and values. Our focus on equity, leadership and the ethic of care for those we serve are more important than ever. We will cross this new territory, together.

Cordially Yours,

Cheryl J. Logan, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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Section 1

Health and Safety of Students, Families, and Staff

Purpose:
Implement measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 within the school setting.

Physical Distancing

To limit transitions throughout our schools, several steps will be taken. These include staggering passing periods, no locker use during the day and keeping interior doors open for students, limiting contact with as many surfaces as possible. During arrival and dismissal, only doors designated as enter/exit will be used, hand sanitizer & extra masks will be located at each door, and there will be a staggered dismissal at the end of the day.

Transportation to and from school will be impacted by loading students back-to-front, alternating which sides of the bus students sit when possible, and then unloading front to back. Cleaning all interior surfaces of the buses will take place between each route and extra masks will be available upon entering and exiting the bus.

While in the classrooms, physical distancing will be maximized by avoiding face-to-face interactions as much as possible. Desks/tables will be aligned to face the front of the class and if tables must be used, only one student may sit at a table at a time when possible. Any equipment that must be shared in a building will be cleaned between each class. Based on capacity and utilization, each building will be responsible for designating how lunches operate given the following guidelines: all students must stop at the restroom on the way to lunch to wash their hands, students should not face one another while eating, masks must be worn while not eating, hand sanitizer will be available before entering the lunch line and must be used, and all seating will be six feet apart. To facilitate proper lunch etiquette, Nutrition Services will provide signs that designate proper line distancing as well as provide grab-and-go meals and tray covers.

During recess, non-contact activities will be encouraged. Students may take their masks off while physically active and away from other children but masks must be worn immediately before and after recess. After recess, all items used by students will be cleaned and sanitized. There will be no assemblies, field trips, visitors entering the building, outside organization use, etc., until restrictions have been lifted.

Protective Equipment/Cleaning & Disinfection

To maintain safe, clean, and secure spaces, five cloth face masks will be provided to each staff member and student. Disposable masks, disposable gloves, barrier gowns, spray disinfectant/disinfectant wipes and disposable suits will be available at each school based on job responsibilities and disposable masks as well as spray disinfectant/disinfectant wipes will be available on all buses. Plexiglass barriers will be placed in each school's main office, speech-language pathology office, and nurse's office. Touchless thermometers will be used to take the temperature of children not feeling well. In a specific situation where masks cannot be worn, face shields will be available for designated staff and students. All school buildings and high-traffic touch points (i.e., handrails, door handles, etc.) will be disinfected multiple times a week.

Symptom Identification and Response

Knowing that early detection is paramount, parents are requested to screen their children daily and are expected to keep their children home if they answer yes to the screening questions that are available through the Douglas County Health Department. Students who present with symptoms will be isolated until a designated adult is able to pick them up from school.

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Section 2

Ethic of Care

Purpose:
Support the wellbeing of students and staff.

Social Emotional Support

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. To ensure staff and students have the necessary support and resources to process through their emotions in a safe and secure setting and transition successfully back to school, Student and Community Services will prepare and deliver professional development for all school staff. In addition, needed resources and supports will be specifically outlined and readily available to those in need.

Resources and Strategies

Preparing staff (Counselors, Social Workers, School Psychologists, etc.) to actively support students in need of mental and emotional support or known to have significant life challenges is of the utmost importance. There are several avenues that will allow for the targeted wellness checks that our students and families deserve.

At the district level, updates to the staff self-care web page and promotion of employee assistance programs will continue. To increase the efficacy of our staff, professional development with an intentional focus on social and emotional skill building, mental and behavioral health, personal safety, and self-regulatory capacity is planned throughout the opening phase. There will also be 24/7 support for students via the Safe Schools Hotline in partnership with Boys Town. Administrators and supervisors will continue to provide regular training related to Policy 5402 and mandatory reporting requirements and expectations.

At all schools and programs, social work case management will continue and be consistently monitored to ensure students are receiving their basic needs. Regular, informal check-ins with all students will be scheduled especially in times of virtual learning. The student support team (i.e., counselors, social workers, and school psychologists) will facilitate the formation of small groups on managing emotions, conflict, and interpersonal skills. Suicide prevention education for all building staff will assist in assessment an intervention with identified students. Finally, new MTSS-B trauma professional development for all school staff will focus on trauma awareness, identifying indicators and behaviors of trauma, working with students, and ongoing supports and resources in a tiered model. Counselors will also embed social emotional learning activities into lessons during scheduled classroom visits.

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Section 3

Instruction

Purpose:
Maximize learning
time for students.

Instructional Models

Understanding that planning for many eventualities will allow for a successful academic year, three different instructional models have been developed. An on-site learning model where all students attend daily for in-person instruction, in accordance with public health requirements. This model most closely resembles school operations prior to the pandemic. Instruction would incorporate technology for a blended learning environment and district grading practices will be followed. A family 3/2 learning model where two pre-determined student groups alternate between in-person instruction and planned learning at home. Approximately 50% of students will be present in school on any given day and district grading practices will be followed. Family training, resources, and common at-home learning expectations will be provided by staff throughout our district. Finally, a remote learning model where all students participate in learning and instruction at home and district grading practices will be utilized. Family training, resources, and expectations will be provided by staff throughout our district.

Instructional Schedule

Mirroring the instructional models, several schedules have been developed. For the on-site learning model schools follow their regular school created schedule. For the family 3/2 learning model students are placed in one of two cohort groups and attend school and at home learning on assigned pre-determined days to allow accordance with health and safety measures. Approximately 50% of time will be in school face to face and 50% of time is at home planned learning. Lastly, for the remote learning model schools will follow guidelines provided by the district. A daily schedule will provide consistency for teaching and learning. This schedule takes into consideration best practices for screen time and remote learning.

Professional Development

Knowing that professional development helps educators to not only be competent in their profession, but allows them to excel in it, several professional development initiatives have been developed. First, there were remote professional learning days in which all certified staff were able to participate in 42 hours of asynchronous learning and collaboration time. Additionally, K-5 teachers received synchronous learning on the new ELA resource Into Reading. Asynchronous learning was also provided to classified staff and made available to new teachers. There are currently opportunities for summer curriculum writing to engage teachers in revising and updating the A+ OPS Curriculum Guides to include supports for digital and blended learning in all content areas. This work will allow teachers and schools to transition from one instructional learning model to another based on public health requirements. New teacher training at the beginning of the year will give incoming educators an introduction to the A+ OPS Curriculum Guides and district adopted materials and resources. New teachers will meet with Curriculum and Instruction Support five additional times throughout the school year. On curriculum day, elementary schools will focus on the new ELA resource Into Reading. All levels will support teachers in teaching and learning on the On-site, Family 3/2, and Remote learning models. Coaching will be supported by teaching and learning consultants, lead teachers, and content area coaches. iPad specific training will consist of three hours of professional development

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provided by Apple at the opening of the year; one-hour provided by video on Omaha Public Schools expectations to be completed by September 7; with additional trainings to occur throughout the year. During principal meetings, data driven coaching and feedback for continuous school improvement will refine and advance teacher practice, improve academic and behavioral outcomes, and build leadership.

Instructional Considerations

It is critical to focus attention on accelerating learning by investing in relationships, honoring student voice, and designing integrated learning around grade-level or above standards. In contrast to remediation efforts, which perpetuate low expectations and lead to disparate outcomes, students who access accelerated learning and advanced coursework demonstrate consistently higher learning outcomes, increased engagement, and academic independence. Individual plans may be developed to ensure the unique needs of students with disabilities are met.

Athletics and Extra-Curricular

It is critical we continue to work in accordance with public health requirements regarding our athletic programs and extra-curricular activities. Two goals frame our work: prioritize the safety of our students and coaches/sponsors and ensure consistent and equitable access for every student across our district.