

Dobbs Ferry Schools Reopening Plan 2021-2022

(Updated 10/19/2021)

Our students, teachers, staff, and administrators were excited to be back to school, full time and in person, starting on **Thursday, September 9, 2021**. Using many of the District's successful strategies already in place and building on our experience, we are making important updates and changes to our procedures and protocols for the 2021-2022 school year in response to the latest guidance. The guidance we are following includes the [New York State Department of Health \(NYSDOH\) Guidance Document](#) we received on September 2, and the [New York State Education Department \(NYSED\) Health and Safety Guide](#) that was issued in August 2021, in addition to guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). We anticipate that updates to this plan will be necessary due to the shifting nature of COVID-19 variants and the likelihood of changing guidelines from New York State.

We remain optimistic that by continuing to work in partnership with our parents, Westchester public health officials, our school medical director, and quad-village colleagues, we can open safely and stay open. Our ultimate goal is to mitigate infection and to keep students physically present in school, while providing a robust educational experience.

Instructional Program

Dobbs Ferry students and staff will be returning to school on Thursday, September 9th with normal, in-person instruction for all students, grades K-12. We will be full time, in person all day, every day.

We will NOT be offering a Hybrid or Remote Learning option with the exception of students who are in school-ordered quarantine due to documented exposure of a confirmed, positive case of COVID-19 or students who have been excluded from school because they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19. This will be facilitated via live-streaming and will be coordinated with each student's teachers, as necessary.

Note: The District could be required to return to remote learning if New York State mandates it, if the Westchester County Department of Health orders schools to go

remote because of health and safety reasons, or if other local conditions make it necessary.

State & County Guidance

[Guidance from the New York State Education Department](#), the [New York State Department of Health](#), and the [Westchester County Department of Health](#) will inform our planning. We will also rely on guidance from our school medical director as well as guidance provided from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). COVID-19 is a public health and medical concern, requiring educators to work within the expertise provided by federal, state, and county public health and medical authorities.

Health & Safety Prevention Strategies

The CDC guidance identifies multiple prevention strategies in a layered approach to promote safer in-person learning. This is particularly significant due to the fact that students under age 12 cannot receive the vaccine at this time. These strategies include but are not limited to:

- Promoting vaccination;
- Consistent and correct use of masks;
- Physical distancing;
- Screening testing to quickly identify cases;
- Improved ventilation;
- Proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette;
- Staying home when sick and getting tested;
- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine;
- Monitoring community transmission; and
- Routine cleaning with disinfection.

We will monitor levels of community transmission by contacting the Westchester County Department of Health and/or by using the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#).

Vaccination Guidelines

Vaccination for eligible students and staff is strongly encouraged, but we are not yet authorized to mandate vaccination. The CDC states that **“vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic.** Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.” The more students who are vaccinated in conjunction with other multiple prevention strategies, the better able we are to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households. The CDC states that unvaccinated people remain the greatest concern.

Faculty & Staff

In late summer and early fall of 2021, all faculty and staff in Dobbs Ferry were required to provide proof of vaccination; as a result we know that 93% of faculty and staff are fully vaccinated. The recent mandate from the Governor — although strongly recommending vaccinations for teachers and school staff, including bus drivers and contracted vendors such as food services and security — **DOES NOT REQUIRE VACCINATION.** Instead, the requirement is for weekly screening/testing for COVID-19 infection for those who do not provide proof of vaccination. (See below for details about COVID-19 testing protocols.)

Students

We strongly encourage parents to vaccinate their children who are 12 years of age and older. Vaccination remains our most reliable defense in keeping all children and members of our community safe. The School District has no authority to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for students at this time. When and if vaccinations are approved for children younger than 12 years of age, we will work with our County Health Department and Rivertown partners to once again offer vaccine clinics in our schools.

Mask Requirement

Masks are required for ALL staff and students K-12 when inside the buildings regardless of vaccination status. Any parents or visitors entering the buildings will also be required to wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status and/or community transmission levels. (Gators are not acceptable face coverings.) Masks are not required when on the school campuses outdoors. Mask breaks will remain in place for students

as needed during the school day and will take place outdoors. Buildings will have extra disposable masks on hand for students and staff as needed.

Consistent and correct mask use (fitting snugly over the mouth and nose) is particularly important indoors, when physical distancing cannot be maintained, and in areas of high transmission of COVID-19. When teachers, staff, and students (ages 2 years and older) consistently and correctly wear a mask, they protect others as well as themselves.

According to the NYSDOH guidance, students wearing properly fitting masks should be seated at least three feet apart in classrooms, to the extent possible. We have worked hard to adhere to this standard in our schools. Staff and teachers are required to wear masks and maintain a distance of six feet from students, except when conducting activities that require a closer distance to a student.

Masks are not required while eating, drinking, playing wind instruments, or singing, but six feet of social distancing must be maintained. In Dobbs Ferry, we will also continue to conduct these activities outside as often and as long as possible.

People with medical or developmental conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask may be exempted from mask requirements, as documented by a medical provider.

The CDC has recently updated its [guidance on masks](#) due to emerging evidence that demonstrates that the Delta variant of COVID-19, currently the predominant strain in the United States, is more infectious and has led to increased transmissibility when compared to other variants, even in vaccinated individuals.

We expect all students, staff, and visitors in our buildings to adhere to the mask mandate, which will be strictly enforced at all times.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing in classrooms and common areas within the buildings will continue to be three feet minimum to the extent possible. The CDC recommends that schools try to maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing, to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. At least three feet of physical distancing is achievable in all classrooms in Dobbs Ferry. When possible, distance will be increased.

A distance of at least six feet is recommended between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated. This six-foot distance is achievable in all classrooms in Dobbs Ferry and is important to maintain so that quarantining of staff is kept to a minimum.

Surveillance Testing

The District will be participating in a staff/student surveillance testing program run by Quadrant Biosciences and coordinated with the Westchester County Department of Health (WCDOH) that is new for us this year. The test will be a saliva-based PCR test. Participation in the surveillance testing program is not mandatory; parents and staff will be asked to sign consent forms before the program begins.

The program relies on two testing strategies:

- Testing of all students, teachers, and staff conducted within the first few weeks of school
- Weekly testing of a random sample of 20% of all students, teachers, and staff thereafter

Surveillance testing will consist of a “cheek swab” and will be conducted on-site at all three schools. Samples will be processed using accurate and reliable PCR analysis — the gold standard of COVID-19 testing — to identify positive cases. The testing process will be conducted by our assigned vendor, Quadrant Biosciences, although school staff will also be present.

This method of surveillance testing will allow for early detection of COVID-19 in pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals. Early detection means we can better stop the virus from spreading in schools. Preventing school outbreaks is key to ensuring our schools stay open to provide the education and support our children need. All students, teachers, and staff — regardless of vaccination status — are highly encouraged to participate in this free, school-based COVID-19 screening testing program.

The WCDOH and our school medical director strongly recommend regular testing as an effective way to mitigate exposure.

COVID-19 Testing for Students

The District is offering surveillance testing in partnership with Quadrant Biosciences and the Westchester County Department of Health (WCDOH). Parents can opt their children into the program at any time. Weekly, 20% of participating students and staff are tested.

Due to current guidance from the WCDOH, our School District will only be able to accept PCR tests for return to school following exposures or quarantining. We will NOT be able to accept rapid or take-home tests. This will be for all staff and students.

COVID-19 Testing for Staff

In addition to the surveillance testing conducted on a random sample of all of our staff, staff who have not provided proof that they are fully vaccinated will also be required to be tested for COVID-19 once per week, either on site or by providing documentation of a negative PCR test from an outside testing site.

The School District will only be able to accept PCR tests. We will NOT be able to accept rapid or take-home tests. This will be for all staff and students.

Contact Tracing & Quarantine Requirements

In general, the CDC defines “close contact” for quarantine purposes as “someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period”.

Pursuant to the NYDOH Guidance and the CDC, in the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students (regardless of vaccination status) who were at least 3 feet from an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. The close contact definition for staff and for anyone who is outside and unmasked remains 6 feet.

We will maintain seating charts for students in class, at lunch, and on buses to conduct contact tracing and determine quarantine status for exposed persons.

According to the CDC guidance that is embedded in the NYSDOH Guidance, people who are fully vaccinated do NOT need to quarantine after close contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless they have symptoms. However, fully vaccinated people

should get tested 3-5 days after their exposure, even if they do not have symptoms, and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until they receive a negative test result.

Return to School Testing Following Exposure to COVID-19

All students, staff, and faculty who exhibit new or worsening symptoms of COVID-19 will be excluded from school, including those who are fully vaccinated, until such individuals present a negative COVID-19 test result or stay out from school for a minimum of 10 calendar days from the onset of symptoms, symptoms are improving, and the person is fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medication) for at least 24 hours. This can be done with a note from a health care provider stating that the COVID-19 test was negative or the individual is symptom-free, or by providing a copy of the negative test result. Symptomatic, fully vaccinated individuals are not exempt from this return-to-school process.

Currently, only NAAT (Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests, such as polymerase chain reaction, or PCR tests) are allowed in order for students to return to school due to the high transmission rates in Westchester County. Rapid tests, antigen tests, and “at-home” tests will not be accepted at this time.

Online Health Screening

For now, we will require temperature checks and the health attestation only for visitors who need to access our buildings. However, if we see that parents are sending children to school with symptoms of COVID-19, we will reintroduce this process. We implore parents to please keep sick children home from school and to have their child tested if the illness involves COVID-19 symptoms. Keeping our schools safe and our children healthy is a community responsibility and we all need to do our part.

Barriers

Plexiglass Barriers will remain in place in public-facing spaces such as offices and security desks. Barriers are available and can be requested by individual teachers or students for classroom use if wanted. Teacher desks will still have barriers if so desired. Barriers will also be used in the Springhurst cafeteria and the Commons.

Lunch & Mealtime Procedures

For the beginning of the school year, all High School students will eat outdoors (they have open campus during lunch and academic studies). Seating will be available outdoors. In the event of inclement weather, we will utilize the overhang area in front of the Commons and the gym. Grab n' Go meals will also be provided daily for breakfast and lunch for those students who choose this option. Middle School students will eat inside the Commons in cohorts, spaced at least 6 feet apart, and with an option to eat outside if they prefer. The outside courtyard will have tables set up for Middle School students. At this time, we are planning for Springhurst students to eat in the cafeteria (all purpose room) with staggered seating and the maximum allowable distance between students.

Both the Springhurst cafeteria and the Commons will have plexiglass barriers in place during lunch periods when the students can remove their masks to eat. Air purifiers are installed in the cafeterias at both Springhurst and the Commons and doors and windows will be open.

The District has applied for a federal grant that will allow us to offer free meals again this year to all students. Students will have the option of hot meals, sandwiches, salads, and Grab n' Go items.

Busing

Busing procedures will require all students and adults to wear masks at all times while on the vehicle. All windows must be cracked or open to provide outside ventilation. Students will have regular assigned seating and siblings will be seated together.

Ventilation and Facility Cleaning/Disinfection

Improved ventilation inside school buildings can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. We have installed new HVAC units and/or upgraded filters in our existing HVAC systems to improve air filtration. At Springhurst we have MERV 11 filters. At the Middle School/High School we have MERV 11 filters, but all the new equipment being installed as part of the capital projects has MERV 13 filters. We also have portable air purifiers that use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to enhance air cleaning in every classroom, and common spaces (cafeterias, gymnasiums). All Middle School classrooms and most Springhurst classrooms will begin the year with two air purifiers in each room allowing for up to six air exchanges/hour. Windows will be open to the greatest degree possible and classroom air handlers bring a continuous supply of fresh air into classrooms.

Classrooms will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected daily.

Hand Washing & Respiratory Etiquette

The CDC and Westchester DOH recommend that covering coughs and sneezes can help keep teachers, staff, and students from getting and spreading COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses.

- Teachers will continue to remind and encourage students to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Hand sanitizer stations, containing at least 60 percent alcohol, are also available for all adults and students in central locations throughout the buildings