



DECATUR COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Return to Learn Plan
2023-2024



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Introduction

For the 2023-2024 school year, Decatur County Community Schools will again be providing face-to-face instruction according to our adopted school calendar with the first day of school being Thursday, August 3, 2023.

According to Governor Holcomb's Executive Order 21-15 issued May 28, 2021, after July 1, 2021, local school boards of public K-12 education institutions will be responsible for implementing whatever measures and restrictions deemed necessary and prudent to address the impact and spread of COVID-19.

Governor Holcomb has empowered each school district to consider and evaluate all aspects of returning to school and to develop a re-entry plan that considers the recommendations and addresses local district capabilities while still delivering a quality education.

For the 2023-2024 school year Decatur County Community Schools will be constantly evaluating two key factors:

- 1) the school's ability to maintain a safe and healthy school environment, and
- 2) the prevalence of COVID-19 in our community.

We will be working closely with the Decatur County Health Department to guide us if any adjustments need to be made during the school year.

We realize our schools play an integral part in our community, and with that we have the added responsibility to make sure we are doing everything possible to keep students, staff, and community as safe as we can. The steps presented in this document will allow us to not only educate students, but keep everyone safe as we navigate through these uncertain times. Please know revisions to this document are expected as dictated by circumstances surrounding COVID-19.

Maintaining a Clean and Healthy Environment

Decatur County Community Schools is committed to creating and maintaining the safest learning environment possible, balanced with maintaining a level of face-to-face instruction. The following protocols are being implemented for the 2023-2024 school year and are subject to change based upon two key factors:

- 1) the school district's ability to maintain a safe and healthy school environment, and
- 2) the prevalence of COVID-19 in our community.

DCCS will continue to work closely with the Decatur County Health Department to help guide any changes that need to be made to these protocols.

Cleaning Protocols

- Daily schedules will be adjusted to provide adequate time for handwashing, sanitizing desks, and other good hygiene practices as needed.
- Custodians will use Critical Care by Envirox for the following reasons:
 - 3 minute immediate disinfection of COVID-19
 - 24 -hour residual bacteria kill
 - Odorless-no harsh disinfectant smell
 - Disinfectant-Fungicide-Virucide
 - Reduced toxicity-HMIS Health = 0
- Schools will be sanitized and disinfected after each school day in preparation of the next day.
- Bathrooms and high touch areas will be disinfected throughout the school day.

Healthy Practices

- Space between students will be increased during in-person instruction.
- Small groups will remain static and the number of students will be limited to the extent possible.
- Desks will be arranged to allow for maximum space available between students.
- Minimize the sharing of electronic devices, toys, books, art supplies, and other games or learning aids when possible.
- Restroom breaks will be scheduled to avoid overcrowding when possible.
- Elective assemblies, field trips, and other large gatherings are permissible.
- Teachers will monitor and encourage social distancing.

Visitors:

- Visitors, other than parents, must be approved by building administrators.
- Sign-in sheets will be used for in-person meetings to document attendees for contact tracing purposes.

Health Protocol for Schools

It is essential for the school community to work together to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in the school environment and in the community while still providing a quality education program.

State statute gives public school districts the authority to exclude students who have a contagious disease such as COVID-19 or are liable to transmit it after exposure (IC 20-34-3-9). In addition, the local health department has the authority to exclude students from school and may order students and others to isolate or quarantine (IC 16-41-9-1.6). As such, districts/schools are encouraged to work closely with their local health departments.

Vaccinated Staff and Students

All staff members and students that provide proof of a Covid vaccination do not need to quarantine if they are identified as a close contact as long as the individual remains asymptomatic (monitor for symptoms).

Symptoms Impacting Consideration for Exclusion from School

Students and employees [should be trained](#) to recognize the following COVID-19-related symptoms:

- A fever of 100.4° F or greater
- Muscle or body aches
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Headache

Students and employees should be excluded from school if they test positive for COVID-19 or exhibit one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19 based on [CDC Guidance](#) that is not explained.

Contact Tracing Guidelines

- Contact tracing with quarantine is now defined at anything less than 3 feet. For students exposed to a positive student who was within 3-6 feet, the parent/guardian will be notified, and the parent will make the decision to keep the student at home or continue to send them to school.
- Quarantine situations will be for 10 days.

Return to School After Exclusion

Once a student or employee is excluded from the school environment, they may return if they satisfy the recommendations of the CDC. Currently those guidelines are:

Untested

Persons who have not received a test proving or disproving the presence of COVID-19 but experience symptoms may return if the following three conditions are met:

- They have not had a fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers); and
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved); and
- At least 10 calendar days have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

The state [website](#) has a list of over 200 testing facilities, their location, and hours of operation. This list is updated frequently.

Tested Positive- Symptomatic

Persons who experienced symptoms and have been tested for COVID-19 may return to school if the following conditions are met:

- At least 10 calendar days have passed since symptoms first appeared; and
- The individual no longer has a fever (without the use medicine that reduces fevers); and
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved)

Tested Positive- Asymptomatic

Persons who have not had symptoms but test positive for COVID-19 may return when they have gone ten calendar days without symptoms and have been released by a healthcare provider. Students may also return if they are approved to do so in writing by the student's health care provider.

Tested Negative

Persons who have had symptoms of COVID-19 and received a negative test result may return to school when:

- The individual has not had a fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers)
- The individual has a doctor's note that it is safe to return to school.

Someone in the Household Tests Positive

Students and employees should remain home if someone in the household has COVID-19 symptoms or is being tested for COVID-19. Individuals in the same household with someone that has tested positive for COVID-19 must quarantine while the positive individual is being isolated. Once the individual that tested positive has completed their isolation, all the family members in their household must then begin their own 10 day quarantine. Even without symptoms, if a student or employee has recently had contact

with a person with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, or has someone in their home being tested for COVID-19, or has recently traveled from somewhere considered to be a “hot spot” by the CDC, Decatur County Community Schools may choose to exclude the student or employee from the school building and recommend that they self-quarantine for 10 calendar days. The amount of time out of school could be longer if the student then becomes symptomatic.

Tested Positive- Impact on School Operations

In the event an infected person has been in one of our schools, the Decatur County Health Department and the Indiana Department of Education will be contacted immediately. School personnel and parents/guardians will be notified when their child has had prolonged, close proximity with an individual who tests positive for COVID-19. The Decatur County Health Department will assist Decatur County Community Schools in determining an appropriate course of action for our schools and community.

At-Home Covid Tests

DCCS has decided to not accept the results of any at-home Covid test or test results due to the lack of a controlled environment and the ease to which an at-home test can be manipulated. In the event a student tests positive on an at-home covid test, the student will be asked to stay at home until the results of a PCR test are able to confirm the positive test, or the positive student has completed a 10 day isolation. Any individual that is contact traced due to the individual testing positive from an at-home covid test will be notified. Only in instances of contact tracing due to an at-home covid test will contact traced individuals have the option of remaining at school or accept the 10 day quarantine.

Student COVID-19 Symptoms Screening

The current [CDC guidelines](#) recommend screening all students and employees for COVID-19 symptoms and history of exposure. Decatur County Community Schools will require parents to self-screen students for COVID-19 every day prior to leaving for school. If a student has a temperature of 100.4 or greater, or if they feel sick, they are to stay home.

Staff COVID-19 Symptoms Screening

All staff members are required to self-screen every day prior to leaving for school. If a staff member has a temperature of 100.4 or greater, or if they feel sick, they are to stay home. All staff will be provided the appropriate information to assist them in recognizing COVID-19 symptoms and screening.

Tracking Community Spread

The superintendent will track cases of COVID-19 and will communicate regularly with the Decatur County Health Department to determine if any changes are needed to protect students and staff.

Medical Inquiries

Federal law typically limits the type of medical inquiries that can be made, but given the nature of the pandemic more leeway has been given to districts/schools in this circumstance to make additional medical inquiries of staff and students than would otherwise be allowed.

- If a parent tells the district/school that a student is ill, the district/school may ask the parent whether the student is exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19.
- If an employee calls in sick or appears ill, the district/school can inquire as to whether the employee is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.
- If a person is obviously ill, the district/school may make additional inquiries and may exclude the person from school property.

Even without symptoms, if a student or employee has recently had contact with a person with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, has someone in their home being tested for COVID-19, or has recently traveled from somewhere considered to be a “hot spot” by the CDC, the district/school may exclude the student or employee from the school building and recommend that they self-quarantine for 10 calendar days.

Wearing Masks and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - Students

Face masks are **optional** for all students to wear while at school, but are not required at this time. Decatur County Community Schools recognizes the importance of face masks when social distancing is not possible for a period of time greater than 15 minutes. However, consulting with educational and medical experts, we understand mandating all students to wear face masks for six hours or more a day is incredibly challenging.

- Some students may be required to wear additional PPE (i.e. health-related, special conditions, etc.) when directed to do so by student health plans.
- Additional accommodations may need to be made for students based on their individual health plan.

Wearing Masks and Other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - Staff

Decatur County Community Schools staff members are encouraged to wear masks throughout the school day if they feel it is necessary. All staff members will be provided disposable or cloth masks if requested.

Clinical Space COVID -19 Symptomatic

All four schools have a designated space separate where students or staff members who are feeling ill are evaluated by the school nurse and are waiting to be picked up. Only essential staff members will be allowed in this area, and staff must wear appropriate PPE at all times. Students who are ill will be walked out of the building to their parents. A record will be kept of all individuals who received care by the nursing staff. All equipment will be disinfected between each use, and the room will be disinfected several times throughout the day. Families and staff will be required to notify school administration with an update of their symptoms as soon as possible.

Clinic Space Non-COVID-19 Related

Students who do not display symptoms of COVID-19 can be seen and treated in the nurse's clinic. These would include students who are injured during the school day or students with special health care needs such as those with chronic health conditions (i.e. - diabetes or seizures), those requiring medical treatments (i.e. - suctioning, tube feeding, or nebulizers), and those with individual health plans.

Attendance Rewards

Stopping the spread of COVID-19 in our schools is incredibly important, and Decatur County Community Schools does not want to encourage students who are ill to attend school. For the 2021-2022 school year, DCCS is suspending all attendance award programs.

Confirmed Case of COVID-19 on School Property

When there is confirmation that a person infected with COVID-19 was on school property, DCCS will contact the Decatur County Health Department, and the Indiana Department of Education immediately. Unless extenuating circumstances exist, the district/school will work with the local health department to assess factors such as the likelihood of exposure to employees and students in the building, the number of cases in the community, and other factors that will determine building closure.

It is the responsibility of the local health department to contact the person confirmed with COVID-19, inform direct contacts of their possible exposure, and give instructions to those involved with the confirmed case, including siblings and other household members regarding self-quarantine and exclusions. The individual who tested positive will not be identified in communications to the school community at large but may need to be selectively identified for contact tracing by the local health department.

If a closure is determined necessary, schools should consult with their local health department to determine the status of school activities including extracurricular activities, co-curricular activities, and before and after-school programs.

Student Transportation Protocols

For the majority of students that attend Decatur County Community Schools, the school bus is the student's first contact with the school in the morning and the last point of contact in the afternoon. Over 90% of all students that ride one of our buses will spend longer than the CDC's recommendation of less than 15 minutes when not socially distanced six feet. Per CDC order, for the 2023-2024 school year individuals are required to wear masks on public transportation, including school buses, even if fully vaccinated. Information regarding this federal CDC order can be found here

<https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/masks/mask-travel-guidance.html> . Therefore, DCCS is instituting extensive protocols for all school buses to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and protect both students and employees. To help with social distancing, parents are encouraged to provide transportation for their children when possible.

Preparation and Cleaning

- All buses will have cleaning supplies on hand at all times, and bus drivers will be trained on appropriate cleaning methods to help prevent the spread of illness.
- All buses will be cleaned after each route.
- All buses will have seating charts with assigned seats. Seating charts will be shared with school administrators to assist in contact tracing when necessary.
- Bus drivers will have family members seated next to each other on the bus if possible.
- Buses will be dismissed each morning to allow students a staggered entrance into school to minimize the amount of time students are in close contact with one another.
- Bus drivers are required to wear masks or face shields when students are on the bus.

As soon as a school becomes aware of a student or employee who has been exposed to, or has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the bus driver will be informed so their bus can be thoroughly disinfected.

Student Expectations

- All students are required to wear masks or face shields when on the **bus**. Disposable masks will be provided for any student that does not have a mask.
- Students will not be permitted to eat on the bus unless it is deemed medically necessary.
- Students are required to face forward and to stay in their assigned seat for the duration of their school bus trip.

Students that do not comply with these expectations may result in the loss of their school bus privileges.

Food Service Program

The following procedures are being implemented to increase safety in our cafeterias. While social distancing is very difficult in a cafeteria, our plan encourages social distancing where possible, and reduces student interactions to limit possible contact tracing to as few students as possible.

General Procedures

- Sanitation stations will be available at cafeteria entrances.
- Cash transactions will be limited for the safety of students and café staff. Change will not be provided to students. We are asking parents to pre-pay, if possible, using our online payment system. <https://payments.efundsfor schools.com/v3/districts/55467>
- Barcode scanners will be utilized for all grade levels to ensure a touchless checkout.

Lunch Procedures

- All students should wash hands immediately prior to lunch when possible. Hand sanitizer will be available if washing hands is not possible.
- Food sharing is not permitted.
- Choices will still be available to ensure students are able to build a tray that they will want to eat, helping us to minimize food waste.

Athletics and Extracurricular Activities

Athletics and extracurricular activities will be conducted following recommendations and guidance provided by state agencies such as the Indiana Department of Education and the Indiana High School Athletic Association, and local guidance from the Decatur County Health Department. All participants and coaches MUST be symptom-free. Participation is strictly prohibited by anyone exhibiting a fever, or symptoms of COVID-19 found earlier in this document that are not otherwise explained.