

Shaler Area School District

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Dear Shaler Area families,

Happy New Year! We hope that your family has enjoyed a restful, memorable winter break.

Working together, we have been so pleased to maintain in-person instruction for the first half of this school year. Maintaining our shared goal of remaining open for in-person learning is the direct result of collaboration - your support at home and the mitigation efforts here have made this possible. Thank you for your continued support and flexibility.

As we embrace both the challenges and opportunities of the new year, we wanted to begin by sharing that which we have been closely evaluating during our winter break.

Today's communication is three-fold and is intended to:

- Outline provisions for some of the most common scenarios we have experienced throughout the first semester of the year;
- Announce changes to the official recommendations of the CDC regarding quarantine/isolation effective December 27;
- Introduce the District's plan to provide live virtual tutoring in Grades K-12 if a student tests positive for COVID-19 or is quarantined by Shaler Area School District or the Allegheny County Health Department.

Please take a few minutes to carefully review the following and if you have specific questions related to your family's situation, we encourage you to reach out to your school principal, school nurse, or school counselor.

What happens if my student is identified as a close contact?

On December 27, The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [issued updated guidance](#) that has shortened the recommended isolation and quarantine protocols. School districts continue NOT to be required to conduct contact tracing or issue quarantine notices **when a universal mask mandate is in effect** and students are separated by at least three feet.

Therefore, a student will only be identified as a close contact and/or quarantine, [if certain conditions are met](#). If a student is identified as a close contact, the school nurse will contact the student's family and the following steps will be required. *Please note that these steps will be different for a student who is vaccinated.

- **Quarantine (Unvaccinated):** For students who are **unvaccinated**, avoid people outside your household. Only leave your house for medical care. Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.

Unvaccinated, students will be required to quarantine for **5 days** after their last possible exposure to limit the spread of COVID-19. While not required, it is recommended to test on day 5.

- **Quarantine (Vaccinated):** For students who are **fully vaccinated (receiving both doses >6 mo. ago)**, are to wear a mask around others for 10 days, and test on day 5. You should wait until at least the fifth (5th) day after your last known exposure to get tested. If at any point symptoms occur, students should immediately quarantine until tested.

What happens if my student tests positive for COVID-19 (regardless of vaccination status)?

- Immediately contact your [school nurse](#) and **do NOT send your child to school** until you have made contact with our staff.
- **Regardless of vaccination status**, students should **stay home for 5 days after symptom onset**. If the individual has no symptoms, they can return to school after 5 days and must continue to wear a mask around others. If they have a fever, continue to stay at home until the fever resolves.

What instruction is available when a student cannot attend school in person due to quarantine or testing positive for COVID-19?

Beginning on January 10, 2022, students who are quarantined/isolated by the school nurse or Allegheny County will have the opportunity to participate in virtual live tutoring for the duration of their quarantine. Tutoring will be provided by Shaler Area teachers Monday - Friday during the following times via Google Classroom/Zoom:

- Primary School (K-3) 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
- Elementary School (4-6) 3:45 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.
- Middle School (7-8) 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
- High School (9-12) 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Information is available to guide your access to live tutoring sessions and will be provided by the school nurse when a student is either quarantined/isolated. While synchronous attendance at the virtual tutoring sessions is not required, **it is strongly encouraged**. The purpose of this tutoring is to provide academic support in the core content areas (Math, ELA, Science and Social Studies) on assignments and lesson materials during the quarantine/isolation period.

In addition to virtual tutoring, students who are not able to participate in in-person instruction due to illness, quarantine, or any other reason are asked to make arrangements with their teachers to have coursework sent home, accessed through Google classrooms, or made up when they are able to return to school.

How will the District's attendance policy be applied this school year?

Attendance at school is key to student success, especially considering the inconsistency of in-person attendance last year. However, we recognize that there are situations in which a student must be absent from school. Excused/lawful absences include for reasons of illness, quarantine, and family emergency. A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative, lawful absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten (10) cumulative days shall require an excuse from a family physician or state licensed practitioner of the healing arts. A copy of the district's attendance policy, [Policy No. 204 Attendance](#), is located on the district website.

How will the District make a decision whether or not to shift hybrid or virtual instruction, District-wide or for an individual school?

Under current state and local guidelines, there are no circumstances that would require a school or building closure due to COVID-19. **Therefore, Shaler Area does not have plans to transition a school or the district to hybrid or virtual instruction related to COVID-19 case counts at this time.** The District will only consider this option if it is recommended by local or state health officials, and we will maintain a close partnership with our local health officials to determine if or when this decision would be necessary. Based on current guidance from the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health, a school closure MAY be recommended if certain conditions apply. But again, the District will work in close partnership with our local health officials to determine if or when a closure may be necessary.

Will the mandated masking be required in the Shaler Area School District?

Shaler Area School District will continue to follow its approved [Health and Safety Plan](#), which requires universal masking for all K-12 students and staff when in an indoor setting, regardless of vaccination status. Masking in school settings is proven to minimize the spread of COVID-19, particularly in settings where individuals and students are not vaccinated and allows for reduced quarantining to keep individual students and staff in school. Additionally, all visitors are required to wear a mask or face covering when indoors at any Shaler Area building or facility for any reason, including to attend meetings, events, or athletic activities.

As per federal order, all students, staff, and drivers continue to be required to wear masks on school transportation. Based on the CDC's current recommendations, masks are not needed outdoors. The District plans to continue to monitor the guidelines and evaluate this determination when Allegheny County transitions to a "moderate" transmission rate per the [CDC guidelines](#).

We thank you for your patience, understanding and continued collaboration as we work together to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and staff this school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sean C. Aiken
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Bryan E. O'Black
Deputy Superintendent