

# Whitehall-Coplay School District

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

August 19, 2020

Over the past several months, we have all been impacted by COVID-19. Reopening our schools brings new challenges for our community. We must balance the need for our children to return to school with the public health concerns that we all face and to avoid increasing COVID-19 infection rates among our loved ones and neighbors. The fundamental question is this: In what manner can we open schools safely by meeting physical distancing, face covering, and hygiene guidelines established by the state and the CDC to mitigate the spread of COVID-19? As you are already aware, the year will begin under a Blended / Hybrid Instructional model for all students K-12 unless they have opted for WCSD's Learn At Home or Virtual Learning programs.

In addition to the instructional model, we realize there are many other concerns and questions with regard to the start of school that parents and guardians need addressed. The Whitehall-Coplay School District administration has been involved in ongoing collaboration concerning how best to answer many of your questions and we are providing this communication as a reference on the following important informational items...

## **Face Coverings** –

Recently, the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) released updates to their face covering guidance](#) strongly recommending children age two and older should wear face coverings **at all times** to help mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Prior guidance released in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) stated students in schools could remove their face coverings as long as six feet of social distancing could be maintained. Given recent changes from the AAP and consistent with the [Secretary of Health's Face Covering Order issued on July 1, 2020](#), the DOH is requiring **students wear face coverings at all times while in school**, even when six feet of social distancing can be achieved. There are limited exceptions. Please refer to the following link for additional information...[Answers to FAQs on Face Coverings/Masks webpage](#).

Thus, per the [Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Universal Face Covering Order](#) (July 1, 2020), all Whitehall-Coplay School District students are required to wear a face covering (face shields or masks) unless a student with disabilities whose IEP or 504 teams have granted an exception. *For any student who has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school, the WCSD will require medical documentation.* Face

The Whitehall-Coplay School District, an equal opportunity employer, will not discriminate in employment, educational programs or activities, based on race, sex, handicap or because a person is a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam Era. This policy of non-discrimination extends to all other legally protected classifications. Publication of this policy in this document is in accordance with State and Federal laws including Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We further affirm that all curriculum offerings and student enrollment practices will be handled without discrimination based on sex, race, religion, national origin, or non-job related handicaps or disabilities.

coverings should be either a solid color or patterned and any symbols or words appearing on the face covering must be school appropriate. *Bandanas, gaiters, buffs, or masks with exhalation valves are NOT acceptable face coverings and are prohibited from use as these face coverings have recently been found to transmit droplets into the air. Also, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), masks with exhalation valves or vents allow air to be expelled through holes in the material. The CDC does not recommend using masks if they have an exhalation valve or vent. Furthermore, we have consulted with St. Luke's University Health Network and have determined that these types of masks are not acceptable.*

Face coverings must be worn in a manner that suits the recommendations set forth in the Pennsylvania Universal Face Covering Order and the [CDC cloth face covering guidelines](#):

- The mouth and nose are fully covered
  - The face covering fits snugly against the sides of the face so there are no gaps
  - The student should not have any difficulty breathing while wearing the face covering
  - The face covering can be tied or otherwise secured to prevent slipping.
- **K-5 Safety Education/Consequences:**
    - Direct instruction will be provided to all K-5 students during the first weeks of school, explaining why we need to wear face coverings, social distance, and wash /sanitize hands frequently throughout the school year.
    - Face covering breaks will be scheduled for all elementary students throughout the day.
    - Students will be redirected and reminded to follow guidelines associated with face coverings and social distancing. Disciplinary consequences will include parent contacts and/ or conferences and could result in exclusion from in-person instruction if regular compliance is not maintained.
    - Repeated offences may result in the student being sent home and required to attend school via the WCSD At Home Learning option.
  - **6-12 Consequences:**
    - 1st Offense: Removal of student from learning environment, warning to student, phone call to parents, and documentation of infraction.
    - 2nd Offense: Students will be sent home, the insubordination with the accompanying consequences will be documented, and parents will be notified that, at the next infraction, students will be required to attend school via the WCSD At Home Learning option.
    - 3rd Offense: Students will be sent home and begin to attend school via the WCSD At Home Learning option for the remainder of the quarter.
    - 4th Offense: Students will be sent home and begin to attend school via the WCSD At Home Learning option for the remainder of the semester.

## **Travel Restrictions / Quarantine -**

The Whitehall-Coplay School District wishes to ensure all parents are aware of the Governor's state quarantine recommendations implemented earlier this summer.

As a district we will be following these recommendations and requiring that students returning from any of the states listed as per the Department of Health's COVID-19 Information for Travelers,

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quarantine for 14 days. Please note these recommendations are ever evolving and it is important to check the listing regularly. Additionally, the United States remains in a Global Level 4 Health Advisory and The Department of State advises U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. Please refer to the [DOH COVID-19 Information for Travelers](#) for additional information.

## **Busing** –

Our students will be required to wear masks while boarding, riding, and exiting the bus. Our drivers will also be wearing either a facial covering or a shield and they will remain on whenever they are around students.

Seats will be assigned at every grade level to help with contact tracing if necessary. We will be requiring that siblings and students living in the same home sit together. When students board the bus, they will fill the seats in the back of the bus first, looking for their name which will be affixed to the side of the bus. When students arrive at their designated school, the driver will dismiss the students by seat in an effort to practice social distancing as much as possible.

We are asking that students and parents wear masks and practice social distancing at the bus stop as best as possible.

## **Daily Student Screening** -

Ongoing monitoring of students for symptoms of COVID - 19 is extremely important as we attempt to provide the safest possible environment for our students and staff. The Whitehall-Coplay School District requires that...

- Each morning parents / guardians take their child(ren)'s temperature and follow screening questions ([Daily Screener Link below](#)) before going to the bus stop or dropping their child(ren) off at school.
- Parents are asked not to send students to school if they are exhibiting symptoms or have come in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

[Parent / Student STUDENT SCREENING PROCEDURE](#)

## **Attendance Procedures** - \_

Regular attendance is necessary for a student to be successful academically. Future employers and colleges may examine your high school attendance record when you apply for a job or college admission. The pattern of attendance you develop in high school may influence your behavior beyond high school. Therefore, it is in your best interest to have as few absences and tardies as possible.

### **“LEARNING FROM HOME” ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES**

Students are only considered as “Learning from Home” based on communication from a parent and/or guardian prior to the start of the school year. A “Present” designation will apply for students Learning From Home if the following conditions are met:

- The student is logged into the class Meet/Zoom session during the designated class time and can be clearly identified.
- For identification purposes, it is required that students temporarily use the video function to show their face at the start of the lesson, during attendance roll call. (Students are not required to leave the video on thereafter, but must be available through audio for questioning and class discussion purposes.)

The following attendance expectations and policies apply to both students who are Learning from Home and learning traditionally as part of the Blended / Hybrid model:

### **Excused Absences**

The School Code of Pennsylvania provides that everyone between the ages of **six (6) and eighteen (18) must attend school**. The only legal excuses for absence are personal illness, quarantine, death in the immediate family, religious holiday, or other exceptional reasons as deemed appropriate by the school administration. An excused absence is counted as an absence. **All absences are unexcused/illegal unless a parent/guardian or doctor note is received in the attendance office.**

**An absentee excuse must be provided within three (3) school days of the absence.** Excuses should include the student's name and grade, date(s) of absence, reason for the absence, and a parent/guardian signature. **Absentee excusal forms** are available in the building attendance offices or online. Parents may also fax an excuse to...

- High School - 610-820-7520
- Middle School - 610-740-9308
- Zephyr - 610-871-3672
- Steckel - 610-435-4022
- Gockley - 610-433-2241

or submit electronically using the link sent to the parent/guardian on the day of the absence. **If a written note is not received within 3 days, the absence will be marked unexcused/illegal.**

**COVID-19:** Any absences accrued due to mandatory quarantine orders will be considered Excused/Lawful absences as dictated by **Board Policy #204**. Be advised, students and parents are required to monitor signs and symptoms of illness on a daily basis. Please refer to the **COVID Quick Reference Student Screener** for additional guidance on daily student screening. Due to the evolving nature of state regulations and guidelines, please refer to the current **PA Department of Education** for additional guidance. **Please contact your child's School Administration immediately if your child has been ordered to quarantine.**

Parents/Guardians are expected to call their child(ren)'s school at...

- High School - 610-437-5081
- Middle School - 610-439-1439
- Zephyr - 610-871-3671
- Steckel - 610-435-1521
- Gockley - 610-433-7551

between 7:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. if their child will be absent. If there is no answer, leave a voice message. **The phone call must be followed by a written note upon the student's return to school to identify the absence as excused.**

An excused absence permits the student to make up missed assignments. It is the student's responsibility to initiate the make-up work after returning to school. If a student is or will be absent for more than three consecutive days, the counseling office should be contacted for missed work.

### **Unexcused or Illegal Absences**

The unexcused absence is used to designate an absence of a student who is 18 years or older. The illegal absence is used to designate an absence of a student under 18 years of age. Such reasons as visiting relatives, oversleeping, babysitting, missing the bus, working, shopping, etc. are not acceptable and will be treated as unexcused or illegal absences.

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR UNEXCUSED OR ILLEGAL ABSENCES**

1. All unexcused/illegal absences will result in an inability to make-up any missed graded assignments, quizzes, or tests. **A grade of zero (0) will be given.**
2. The third (3) day of unexcused/illegal absence will result in a first offense truancy letter (warning). The letter will be sent to the parent/guardian of the student with three or more unexcused/illegal absences.
3. Continued truancy, beyond three (3) unexcused/illegal absences, will result in a second warning letter and a possible loss of parking privileges. Contact will be made with both the student and parent to schedule a Truancy Elimination Plan meeting.
4. Upon the sixth (6) day of an unexcused/illegal absence; in accordance with Act 24 of the Pennsylvania Compulsory School Attendance Law; a referral to the magistrate may be made if the student is under the age of 18.
5. Act 24 may also remove the truant student from his/her motor vehicle driving privileges for ninety (90) days on the first offense and for six (6) months for each subsequent offense. Unlicensed truant students will be prohibited from applying for a learner's permit for ninety (90) days on the first offense and for six (6) months for all succeeding offenses after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.
6. **After eight (8) days of absence in a semester, a medical excuse will be required for any subsequent absences.** Parents/Guardians will receive notification by mail that such a medical excuse is required. At that point any excuse not signed by a medical professional will be recorded as unexcused or illegal.
7. Students, 18 years or older, who are absent for ten (10) or more consecutive unexcused days will be dropped from the active membership roles by the high school administration.
8. Students, 18 years or older, who have twenty (20) or more unexcused absences will be dropped from the active membership roles by the high school administration.
9. All unexcused/illegal absences or trancies automatically deny the student the right to make up work and assignments missed during the period of unexcused absences.

## **Protecting Yourself and Others -**

The following links provide information on what you should know about COVID-19 to protect yourself and others.

- [What you should know about COVID-19 to protect yourself and others](#)
- [Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19](#)
- [CDC - How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)
- [COVID-19 and Children](#)

## **Notification of Positive Cases** - \_

Parents, guardians, students, teachers and staff are understandably concerned with what happens when a person is diagnosed with COVID-19. The district will notify parents with children in a school if there is a confirmed positive case of COVID-19 involving a staff member or student of that school. For confidentiality reasons, we cannot and will not identify the person who is presumed or confirmed positive.

Staff members and students who may have come into close contact with the individual will be directly contacted by their local health department with instructions to self-quarantine. Close contact is defined by the CDC as an individual who has been within 6 feet of a positive case for 15 minutes or more. Close contacts of a positive case are required by the PA Department of Health to quarantine for 14 days and will be monitored by the health department. All public health protocols, mitigation, surveillance and contact tracing will be strictly followed.

## **School Closure** -

With regard to COVID-19 cases in a school setting, the Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE) have provided recommendations to Pre-K to 12 schools for use in consultation with public health staff when making decisions related to school procedures following a case of COVID-19 in a school.

When a case of COVID-19 is identified in a school setting, public health staff from DOH or the County or Municipal Health Department (CMHD) will work with school administrators to provide guidance and advice related to cleaning and disinfecting, contact tracing and quarantine recommendations, and closing certain areas of the school or the entire school building if necessary. **When an entire school is recommended to close, lengths of closure time will vary by level of community transmission and number of cases.** This allows public health staff the necessary time to complete case investigations and contact tracing, and to provide schools with other appropriate public health advice like cleaning and disinfecting.

For additional information on recommendations for Pre-K to 12 Schools Following Identification of a Case(s) of COVID-19, please refer to the [Pennsylvania Department of Education's page guiding decisions related to school procedures following a case of COVID-19 in a school.](#)

## **Technology/Chromebook Distribution** -



Chromebook distribution information such as dates / times / locations / process, etc., will be provided in a separate communication from building administration.

## **WCSD At Home / Online Learning -**

The WCSD has made efforts to provide parents and students with a “one stop shop” resource for all questions and guidance as related to at home learning. The information provided can be utilized for those students who are learning from home five days a week, as well as those students who are part of the Blended / Hybrid model. Please click the link for access to all [WCSD Learn At Home Resources](#).

- Expectations for students
  - All handbook rules apply to students in a Blended / Hybrid or Learning from Home model.
  - Infractions with regard to online behavior will result in disciplinary action ranging from parent/ student conference to suspension from and/or removal from access to virtual classes.

## **WCSD Virtual Learning Network -**

If you have chosen the WCSD Virtual Learning Program, you will receive separate communication from Dr. Barbara Chomik, Dir. of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment for the Whitehall-Coplay School District. Additional information on the program can be found at <https://www.whitehallcoplay.org/domain/3344>. Questions regarding the program can be directed to Linda P. Sobchak, Secretary to Curriculum & Instruction, [sobchakl@whitehallcoplay.org](mailto:sobchakl@whitehallcoplay.org) - 610-439-1431, EXT. 1013.

## **Additional Resources -**

For any families needing information on resources such as food distribution, internet access, emotional well being, parenting, etc. please refer to the WCSD district website using the following link: [Resources for Families During COVID-19](#)

## **Food Distribution -**

While involved in at home learning as part of the five day a week program or as part of the Blended / Hybrid model, food will be available and distributed at the front of the High School. Additional information will be provided on days / times for distribution, process for ordering, etc., in a follow up communication.

In closing, we understand it is impossible to meet the needs and concerns of every family within our educational community. WCSD's reopening plan is based on state and local governmental guidance as well as expert medical advice and our educational expertise. Our goal is to strike a balance between the educational needs of our students while also providing a safe and healthy environment for all. As we have learned throughout the pandemic, conditions and guidance change regularly. **It is**

**important to note that we should all be prepared for potential future changes to school procedures and schedules, including the closure of schools.**

As always, we greatly appreciate your patience, understanding and support.

Sincerely,

WCSD Administration