**Vermilion Association for Special Education**

**Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan**

**Maintaining the Health and Safety of Students, Educators, and Other Staff**

* In accordance with the Illinois State Superintendent of Schools July 9, 2021 declaration, all students placed in programs run by the Vermilion Association for Special Education (VASE) will be open fully for in-person learning for all student attendance days for the 2021-2022 school year. Middlefork School and the Regional Safe School Program will run on a regular dismissal schedule.  VASE will use the CDC’s updated (July 27, 2021) *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Kindergarten (K)-12 Schools*, which was also adopted by the IDPH on July 27, 2021, as guidance for the operation of its schools as well as Governor Pritzker’s masking mandate announced on August 4, 2021.

**Mask Use**

* Mask use is mandatory indoors for all teachers, students, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status.
* Mask use is preferred outdoors for individuals who are not fully vaccinated during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission.
* Mask use is mandatory by all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.

**Physical Distancing**

* The CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms. The cooperative will follow this recommendation in the classroom, hallways, and cafeteria spaces.
* Students should make an effort to social distance from other students to the greatest extent possible.

**Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

* School staff will monitor and reinforce frequent handwashing and respiratory etiquette.
* Students are encouraged to frequently wash their hands. Hand sanitizer will be made available throughout the schools.

**Cleaning, Disinfection, and Ventilation**

* School staff will continue to clean surfaces on a regular basis. Particular attention will be given to disinfecting areas where a known COVID-positive individual has been present.
* Windows will be kept open in classrooms and buses when feasible to improve ventilation.

**Isolation and Quarantine**

* Students and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness must remain at home until symptoms have improved. They are encouraged to seek medical advice.
  + Symptoms include fever (100.4 or higher), moderate to severe headache, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell, fatigue from unknown causes, muscle or body aches from unknown causes.
  + Students with a fever must remain out of school until they have been 24-hour fever free without fever-reducing medication.
* Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 must remain out of school until they meet ALL of the following criteria:
  + Symptom-free
  + 24-hour fever free without fever-reducing medication
  + A minimum of 10-days must pass after symptoms first appeared (or 10-days after testing if asymptomatic)
* Non-vaccinated students and staff who have a member of their household that has tested positive for COVID-19 must remain out of school until the positive individual is released from isolation if the positive individual is unable to isolate away from the student/staff member.
* Fully vaccinated students and staff who remain asymptomatic and those with documented COVID-19 infection within the past 90 days are excluded from quarantine.
* Classroom students who were within 3 to 6 feet of the infected student are not treated as close contacts as long as both the infected student and exposed student were engaged in consistent and correct use of a well-fitting mask and other K-12 school prevention strategies (such as social distancing). Only classroom contacts within 3 feet require quarantine as long as both the case and the contact were consistently masked.
* In all other instances, the cooperative will follow the lead of the Vermilion County Health Department in regards to individuals needing to quarantine due to exposure.
* Students who are excluded from school for COVID-related reasons will be given an excused absence.  They will be provided with all school work and will be allowed to submit it for full credit. Teachers will be available to assist students via email, phone, Google classroom or Zoom as needed.

**Screening Testing**

* If a student or staff member is exhibiting COVID-like symptoms, they must 1) submit a negative test, OR 2) submit an alternative diagnosis from a physician, OR 3) remain home for 10 days.
* The cooperative is currently requesting weekly testing through the University of Illinois Shield Test (saliva test) for students and staff during the 2021-2022 school year.  When more information about the testing process is available, it will be passed on to families and staff.

**Vaccinations**

* Vaccinations are not mandatory and are at the discretion of the staff member or parents/guardians.

**Collaboration with Public Health Officials**

* Cooperative officials will continue to collaborate and consult with Vermilion County Health Department officials throughout a pandemic on various logistics and decision-making including, but not limited to school health and safety protocols, quarantine, and emergency school closings.

**Continuity of Services**

* The cooperative will continue to provide the necessary services to meet the needs of students, including academic, social, emotional, mental, health, and nutritional needs.
* Students will be supported academically through each individuals’ education program (IEP).  Parents/guardians who feel their child needs assistance should contact the building principal.
* Social workers and counselors are available to meet students' social, emotional, and mental health needs.
* All students will be provided with access to free breakfast and lunch on a daily basis. Students who are excluded from school due to being placed in quarantine or isolation may have meals picked up for them or meals sent home by their resident district.  Parents should contact building secretaries of their home school to arrange details for pick up.

**Plan Review**

* This plan will be reviewed no less frequently than every six months.
* The district reserves the right to make changes to the plan as needed.

Plan Update: February 18, 2022

Dear Vermilion Association for Special Education Families, Students, and Staff,

Earlier this week, we learned of an action from the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) which voted to reject a reintroduction of emergency rules for COVID-19 protocols in schools which include masking, testing, and exclusion.  Late last night, the Illinois Appellate Court denied the appeal of the Temporary Restraining Order issue by Judge Grischow on February 4th.

The impact of the JCAR committee vote and the denial of appeal by the Appellate Court means that, because these emergency rules have expired, schools can only require employee vaccinations/testing, student and employee masking, and exclusion of close contacts from school if there is a court order or an order from the local health department.

**As a result, beginning Tuesday, February 22, 2022, the Vermilion Association for Special Education will strongly recommend masks for all students and staff in our programs.**

Please note that your child’s home district still requires masks on buses.

Despite the modification of masking policy, we will remain vigilant about providing a safe environment for students and staff. You can expect that we will:

          Continue to implement several mitigating strategies in all our schools, including optional weekly Shield testing, BinaxNow rapid testing for symptomatic individuals, social distancing to the greatest extent possible, and cleaning and sanitizing on a regular basis.

          Recommend any symptomatic students and staff to remain at home.

I understand that this is a shift in our mitigation strategies, and it will be met with differing responses from all stakeholders. I encourage each family to determine what immediate steps they feel are most appropriate for their children and family circumstances. I encourage each of our families to have a conversation with their child about respecting others, including the way in which we each approach COVID. I also encourage everyone to be tolerant and empathetic to others' choices. The Vermilion Association expects each of our students and community members to treat each other with understanding and respect.

Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support.

Sincerely,

Kristin Dunker

Director

Vermilion Association for Special Education

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