



SCS COVID-19 Response Plan

2021 - 2022

**Sumter County Schools
100 Learning Lane
Americus , GA 31719**



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Executive Summary

The nationwide school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have placed a significant strain on public school systems around the country. The Sumter County School System (SCS) is no exception. The SCS ended on-campus instruction for the 2020 school year effective March 2020. For the remainder of the school year, students, teachers, educational leaders used a variety of remote learning approaches to continue the educational process. The majority of faculty and staff transitioned to working remotely and distributing educational packets.

As the schools and district leaders began to look ahead to the 2021-2022 school year, the focus was on meeting the anticipated increased academic and non-academic needs of students.

Challenges to Successfully Reopening for the 2021-2022 School Year

There are five key challenges to successfully reopening schools:

- o **Public health challenge:** First and foremost, the COVID-19 virus is a public health emergency. With its novel nature, much remains to be learned about COVID-19, in terms of its transmission, manifestations, treatments and a cure. The SCS will need to be ready to respond to a variety of scenarios ranging from a return to full closure/remote learning to a modified or full opening.
- o **Lack of agreement:** Second, unfortunately given the lack of precedent, there is lack of agreement as to the appropriate response. Medical and scientific data are limited, constantly changing, and being interpreted in many different ways. The result is that decisions are being questioned and interpreted in various ways.
- o **Decisions will be scrutinized:** Third, the response plan will need to be validated. The response plan will need to withstand the scrutiny of experts, community members, and other SCS stakeholders. Despite the level of planning and details that have gone into the response plan, it should be expected that plans and related decisions will be scrutinized and second-guessed.
- o **Shifting circumstances:** Finally, the SCS will need to constantly evolve. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, there is a possibility of resurgence of cases or waves of resurgence. Full or spot/rolling closures of schools may be necessary.

Using an approach that constantly evolves with the COVID-19 Challenges

Given the above-referenced challenges, the SCS has had a series of leadership meetings to discuss virtual learning as well as a re-opening plan. This approach involves three key steps:

- ❑ **Develop:** First, the SCS needed to quickly and rigorously develop a detailed response plan that takes into account the guidance from federal, state and local agencies, while incorporating the experience gained from this spring.
- ❑ **Validate:** The response plan will need to be validated along three dimensions.
 - First, how well does the plan conform to the best available expertise and thinking that exists?
 - Second, does the plan incorporate the experience and feedback from last spring?
 - Third, how does the plan compare to other districts in the area?
- ❑ **Modify:** SCS school and district leaders need to be able to monitor the results of the response plan and also be able to modify and evolve the approach based on public health policy announcements, stakeholder feedback, and results.

This philosophy requires several things of all of our partners - employees, families, board members and businesses -- in order to be successful:

- **Patience:** While planning for different scenarios will help speed up the district's response and reaction time, there will inevitably be lost time as the district shifts from one model to the next. Patience from all audiences is critical to ensuring the fewest distractions and disruptions during this period.
- **Grace:** Despite working with partners across the state and with some of the brightest minds and planners available, we will not have a seamless operation should we have to pivot from one model to another. Expect some protocols may change along the way, as we get more information and determine more effective ways of getting things done.
- **Communication and Feedback:** The success of any of this plan hinges on thorough communication from the district and appropriate feedback from our stakeholder groups including students, parents and our community partners.

Regardless of the plan, the district fully intends to offer rigorous and relevant academic content and to continue to address the non-academic needs of our students and families. Now, perhaps more than ever, it's important to ensure that we meet the diverse needs of our students. We're committed to doing everything we can to accelerate learning where possible, remediate where necessary and provide emotional and social support to our students where required.

We live in interesting times, but, with your support, grace, and perseverance, we will overcome our challenges while keeping our students and employees safe, engaged and involved in building a better community and brighter future.

Working Groups

There are five essential workgroups that were developed individually and then integrated in order to create a comprehensive, well-thought-out plan in response to Covid-19.

- o **Instructional Core/Social Emotional Learning:** The first workgroup is to develop a well-thought-out plan that addresses the academic and social-emotional learning needs of all students in the district. Given the public health constraints, the plan will need to take into account plans for Face-to-Face (on-campus) instruction. Plans contain detailed considerations for the role and expectations of the teacher, the student, and the curriculum. Plans also consider curriculum, instructional design, school and staffing schedules, and a myriad number of details related to teaching and learning. The social, emotional well-being of students and staff remain the foundation of any successful teaching and learning plan.
- o **Operations:** Given that schools are densely occupied spaces with many ancillary activities (e.g., food service), the SCS created a detailed and well-understood plan for operations. Under what conditions will buildings open? How can schools assure parents and the community that health safety measures are being taken to maintain a safe and healthy environment? How will transportation be managed?
- o **Resources:** In light of the severe economic impact of the pandemic, the State of Georgia is forecasting that public school systems and state agencies will have to absorb up to an 11% reduction in state revenue. A big unknown is whether or not the federal government will pass legislation that will provide additional relief to states. Regardless, school systems (the SCS included) will be faced with mounting costs associated with dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 while at the same time addressing the financial uncertainties it has caused. Multiple financial scenarios and a detailed plan to address any potential budget shortfall are being developed.
- o **Stakeholder Communications:** SCS schools are essential institutions of the Sumter County community, and there are lots of stakeholders directly and indirectly vested in the well-being and plans of the district. These stakeholders range from students, parents, faculty, staff, and school board members all the way to business owners and residents. Schools' ability to function effectively has an outsized impact on the ability of parents to go to work, stores to open, and residents to stay healthy. With so many stakeholders, there is a heightened need for clear and frequent communication. Having a regular cadence and well-developed toolkit to communicate effectively with these stakeholders is crucial for successfully opening in the fall.
- o **Steering Committee:** The final workgroup is led by the superintendent for the express purpose of ensuring that there is coherence among the four workgroups mentioned above. In addition, given the diverse communities served by the SCS, this workgroup has worked to ensure that equity issues are being properly addressed; because, the pandemic is not affecting families equally. Both the coherence and equity are focused on through a public health lens; since, the COVID-19 virus is first and foremost a public health emergency.

Instructional Model

We undoubtedly believe the best model for Pre-K through 12th grade teaching and learning is face-to-face, on-campus instruction. We also know that we must balance this belief with the obligation to provide a healthy and safe learning environment. With the challenges and risks presented by the COVID-19 public health emergency, never has this balance been needed more.

Our goal is to provide Face-to-Face (On-Campus) instruction for our students.

We understand the return to school is a personal decision for each family. Parents will be provided a virtual option if their child meets attendance, academic and technology criteria or their child has extenuating circumstances.

Extenuating Circumstances

Sumter County Schools will make educational accommodations for those students who have extenuating circumstances.

Extenuating circumstances require a letter from a medical doctor with specific health issues identified that prevents them from being in the regular educational setting.

Safety Protocols for Face-to-Face (On-Campus) Learning

Collective Responsibility

The return to in-person learning requires collective responsibility for every SCS family. Failure to exercise proper care and precaution would significantly compromise the health and safety of others. It is imperative, particularly in the current environment, that students are not sent or brought to school if they are sick, or are medicated before school in order to reduce a fever.

We all share a collective responsibility to do the right thing and look out for one another.

Contact Tracing

Based on the most recent DPH guidelines, contact tracing will be initiated for any student or staff member who tests positive for COVID- 19. This process will include identification of and notification to any person (student or staff) who was in close contact with the person within the last 48 hours of symptoms or the positive COVID-19 test. **Close contact is considered less than six feet apart for at least 15 minutes without PPE.**

Face Mask/Face Shield

Students: Use of face mask/face shield is **optional** within the school buildings. Use of face mask is **required** on the bus.

Staff: Use of a face mask/face shield is **optional** with in all SCS's buildings.

Temperature Checks – All Students

All families are requested to check the temperature of their child each day prior to leaving home. SCS schools intend to check the temperature of students daily.

Bus Riders

SCS students who are bus riders will have their temperatures checked while entering the school bus as well as entering the school building. **SCS bus riders will be required to wear a face mask while on the school bus. Additional school bus safety protocols are included later in this document.**

Car Riders

SCS students who are car riders will have their temperatures checked before exiting the vehicle (in the carpool line). Students with a temperature below 100° Fahrenheit will be permitted to exit the car and enter the school; any student with a temperature at or above 100° Fahrenheit will be directed to return home with their parent/guardian or supervising adult.

Drivers

SCS students who drive to school will have their temperatures checked after entering the school building. Students with a temperature below 100° Fahrenheit will be permitted to enter the school; any student with a temperature at or above 100° Fahrenheit will be directed to return home and their parent/guardian will be contacted by school staff.

Entering the Building

Any visitor entering the building has an option to wear a face mask/face shield.

All students will have their temperatures checked by our digital thermal facial recognition camera system. If a student has a temperature of 100 degrees or more, they will be sent to a holding room and have their temperature rechecked after a one-minute wait-time. If the temperature remains high, the parent will be contacted to pick up their child.

Classroom Protocols

To provide the greatest degree of social distancing and safety protocols, teachers will adhere to the following classroom guidelines:

- To separate student desks to the greatest extent possible to provide for social distancing.
- Limit sharing of supplies, books, etc. when possible; sharing of such items calls for disinfecting prior to passing from one student to another. Hand sanitizer and disinfecting spray will be available in each classroom.
- For more details, see individual school's classroom protocol

School Signage

Signage will be placed throughout schools to remind students of personal hygiene (hand washing, coughing into arm, etc.) and social distancing from others. Additionally, signage may be used to create one-way directional walk patterns in some areas of the buildings. Students will also be permitted to walk outside the buildings, when possible, to transition from class to class.

School Meals (Breakfast/Lunch)

See Appendix A for more information

School Cleaning and Disinfecting

See Appendix B for more information

Safety Protocols for Transportation

See Appendix C for more information

General School Activities and Events Safety Protocol

GHSА-Sanctioned Athletics

The SCS is working in collaboration with the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) to develop and adhere to appropriate guidelines for athletic practices and competitions. We expect these guidelines to continue to evolve; each coach will provide updates to our student-athletes and their families, as appropriate. As you have specific questions or needs, please contact your child's coach.

After-School Extracurricular Clubs and Activities

Students will have the opportunity to participate in after-school extracurricular clubs and activities, based on the ability to implement appropriate safety protocols and social distancing guidelines. Please contact the appropriate sponsor/coach for detailed information.

Limit Non-Essential School Visitors and Volunteers

To protect our students and staff, SCS schools and offices will limit non-essential school visitors and volunteers to school campuses.

All essential visitors or volunteers will be subject to a temperature check.

Media Center

SCS schools will limit student use of shared spaces and materials in media centers. Efforts will be made to give students access to learning resources in such a manner that provides the appropriate degree of safety and sanitation.

Student Assemblies and Large Group Events/Meetings

Significant limitations will occur relative to student assemblies and large group events/meetings. School leaders will provide additional details about how such events may occur virtually, when appropriate.

Student Field Trips

Student field trips will be limited. Consideration will be given on a case-by-case basis for field trips that achieve an appropriate degree of social distance and other safety precautions.

Student Teachers / Field Experience Students from Colleges

Please Note: College students must produce a negative test prior to the start of their field experience. The test result is to be given to the building level principal before entering the classroom.

The SCS District highly recommends that all college students that are participating in field experience in the SCS district be vaccinated.

Any college student who is unvaccinated must produce a negative test every two weeks. The test result is to be given to the building level principal before entering the classroom.

Any college student who is vaccinated must produce a negative test monthly. The test result is to be given to the building level principal before entering the classroom.

Any college student who is having to complete 15 hours or less must produce a negative test prior to starting their field experience. The test result is to be given to the building level principal before entering the classroom.

SCS Weekly Snapshot of COVID-19 Cases

Each Friday the SCS will post a one-week snapshot of COVID-19 cases in our schools as reported by each school. Here is some key information to remember about the data reported:

- These cases include both students and staff members.
- Student records are protected by state law and the school district cannot release information that could be used to identify a student. Additionally, students and staff are protected by federal HIPAA law.
- When a school has a confirmed case of COVID-19, the school notifies the Department of Public Health (DPH) and works to identify "close contacts" as defined under DPH guidelines.

Total Quarantined Due to Exposure does not mean individuals were exposed in school setting.

Isolation Guidance

Each isolated person shall remain in isolation until such time as he or she no longer presents a risk of infection to the public, as determined by the Isolation Protocol then in effect. As of the date of this Administrative Order, the Isolation Protocol requires an isolated person to remain in isolation as follows:

(1) If the person was diagnosed with COVID-19 and developed symptoms, isolation may be discontinued when at least 5 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, and at least 24 hours have passed since the last fever without the use of fever-reducing drugs, and symptoms have improved (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). If symptoms are not improving or fever has not resolved, the person should stay in isolation until these criteria are met. If leaving isolation before 10 days have passed, the person should wear a well-fitting mask for the remainder of 10 days.

(2) If the person was diagnosed with COVID-19 but never developed any symptoms (i.e., asymptomatic), then isolation may be discontinued when at least 5 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and there are still no symptoms. If leaving isolation before 10 days have passed, the person should wear a well-fitting mask for the remainder of 10 days.

Quarantine Guidance

Individuals within close contact (less than six feet apart for at least 15 minutes, without Personal Protective Equipment or PPE) to another person in their classroom or office who show COVID-19 related symptoms may also be required to self-quarantine.

Quarantine for individuals not vaccinated for COVID-19 or who are not considered up to date on their COVID-19 vaccination and who have not recently recovered from a COVID-19 infection

The recommended time period for quarantine is 10 days, but you may leave quarantine any day after 5 full days have passed since your most recent exposure occurred if you do not experience any symptoms of COVID-19 and continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others for 5 additional days.

Quarantine for vaccinated individuals who ARE considered up to date on their COVID-19 vaccination

Individuals who meet the above criteria for vaccination and who are exposed to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are NOT required to quarantine, but should:

- Seek testing 5 days after exposure, if possible and
- Wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days after exposure; day 0 is your date of last exposure.

When can they return to school?

- A student who tests positive for COVID-19 and **did not exhibit signs/symptoms** can return to school after at least 10 days have passed since they were tested and they remain symptom free. Please contact your student's school so that determinations for quarantine may be made.
- A student who tests positive for COVID-19 and **does experience symptoms** may return after at least 10 days have passed since their symptoms began. They must be fever-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication and symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved.

Positive COVID-19 Case Notification

In the event that Sumter County School System is notified of a COVID-19 positive case:

- Contact tracing will be performed at the school (may include teachers, administration, paraprofessionals, and nurses) to identify individuals who were in close contact with the positive person up to 48 hours prior to symptoms/positive test results.
- Those who are deemed to be "Close Contacts" of the positive person will receive a phone call and/or a letter informing them that they will need to quarantine at home for a minimum of 5 days with no symptoms from the last exposure to the positive person. This can include exposures from the classroom setting, on the bus, extended day programs, and extracurricular activities.
- The students who are considered "close contacts" will not be penalized for attendance and will be able to work with their teachers to complete assignments online.
- We are required to submit the name and contact information for all known positives and close contacts to the West Central Health District.

- A general letter will go home to those who share a classroom with the person who tested positive, notifying them of the positive case, and that their child has NOT been identified as a close contact and does not need to quarantine at this time.

Child, Teacher or Staff with Symptoms

When a student, teacher, or staff member has symptoms, they will be **immediately** sent home and the school's existing illness management policy should be implemented (e.g., the person cannot return until symptom-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications, etc).

Reporting

Schools are required to:

- Notify your local public health department immediately when a positive COVID-19 case is identified in the school setting (as required by § OCGA 31-12-2)
- Notify your local public health department of clusters or outbreaks of COVID-19 immediately
 1. Clusters of illness are reportable to public health under notifiable disease reporting rules. This includes clusters or outbreaks of COVID-19 or other illnesses. Local epidemiologists will work with each school to collect information about a cluster or outbreak, including but not limited to the number of students and staff at the school, the number which are sick, and the number which are laboratory-confirmed.
 2. A COVID-19 outbreak in a school setting will be defined as: Two or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with illness onsets within a 14-day period, who are epidemiologically linked (e.g., have a common exposure or have been in contact with each other), do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during standard case investigation or contact tracing.
- Develop a procedure to report outbreaks to public health.
 - Individual confirmed and positive cases will be reported to the local health department immediately. Weekly, all cases, clusters, outbreaks, and school closures will be reported to public health
- **WEEKLY, each school must report aggregate data on clusters and outbreaks to public health. NOTE: This mechanism does not replace reporting individual cases and outbreaks to your local public health. Each school should notify local public health officials immediately regarding COVID-19 cases and outbreaks.**
- Weekly, schools must report COVID-19 cases
- For questions regarding reporting COVID-19 to public health and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) please refer to: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/ferpa-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>



Appendix A

COVID-19 Response Procedures for Custodial Department

Sumter County Schools Maintenance Department

Monday-Friday

- **Main point of entry** to school buildings will be sprayed after students arrive each day and throughout the day
- **Cafeterias:** Wipe and disinfect tables and chairs after breakfast and lunch
- **Media Centers:** Wipe and disinfect tables and chairs throughout the day
- **Classrooms:** Spray with disinfectant spray at the end of the day
- **Classroom Door Handles:** Spray throughout the day
- **Front Office:** Countertops to be wiped and disinfected throughout the day
- **All Restrooms:** Cleaned and sprayed throughout the day
- **Cleaning Logs:** Will be maintained

Weekly Deep Cleaning

- Deep clean every classroom and all high traffic areas with foggers
- Deep clean Central Office, Transportation and Maintenance Departments with foggers



Appendix B

COVID-19 Response Procedures for Nutrition Department

Sumter County Schools Nutrition Department

- It is optional that students wear a face mask/face shield at all times when they are not actively eating or drinking. Actively eating is defined as the time students are actually eating and chewing.
- It is optional that students wear a face mask/face shield while picking up their lunch, opening contents, clearing up their area and exiting and entering the location designated for lunch.
- Students should wash their hands before and after lunch. If hand washing is not feasible, use of hand sanitizer is permissible. Students should also use hand sanitizer before taking their face mask/face shield off and putting it back on.
- The School Nutrition team will continue to provide lunches in or on disposable containers or trays for at least the first 6 weeks of school.
- When eating indoors, 3 feet of physical distancing should be maintained.
- Schools should also discuss with staff the most appropriate schedule to allow staff to eat lunch.



Appendix C

COVID-19 Response Procedures for Transportation Department

Sumter County Schools Transportation Department

Sanitization of the School Bus

- All SCS's buses are equipped with Air Filtration Systems.
- All buses will be disinfected when they return from their routes each morning.
- All buses will be disinfected when they return from their routes each evening.

Face Mask/Face Shield

- ❖ Drivers and students are required to wear a face mask/face shield covering their nose and mouth at all times while on the school bus.
- ❖ Drivers will have extra disposable face masks/face shields to ensure that all students have one available.

Thermometers

- ❖ All bus drivers and monitors are required to check their temperatures each morning before entering the bus.
- ❖ All students will be required to have a temperature check each morning prior to entering the bus.
- ❖ Temperatures above **100** degrees F will not be allowed to enter the bus.
- ❖ All Sumter County school buses are equipped with thermometers.

Transporting Students

- ❖ Siblings will be placed on the seat together.
- ❖ The seating capacity will be reduced, when possible.
- ❖ Seats will be assigned according to how students load and unload each day.



Multi Layered Prevention Strategies

Sumter County Schools strongly recommends:

- Desk shields
- Vaccination
- Consistent and correct mask use
- Physical and social distancing
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Staying home when sick and getting tested
- Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine
- Cleaning and disinfection

Sumter County Schools optional:

- The use of face mask/face shields for all faculty, staff, students, and visitors when inside the buildings of Sumter County Schools is optional

Sumter County Schools mandates:

- Use of face mask is required on the school bus.
- 

Mitigation Strategy / Procedure

Face Mask/Face Shield Indoors	The use of face mask/face shields for all faculty, staff, students, and visitors when inside the buildings of Sumter County Schools is optional
Hand Hygiene	Frequent hand washing or use of hand sanitizer, including before and after the following activities: eating lunch, taking face mask/face shield on and off, and when using communal materials. Handwashing is preferable before and after eating lunch; however, if that is not feasible, hand sanitizer is acceptable.
Staff and/or Parent Meetings with 10 or more	District and/or principals are granted autonomy to determine the meeting venue that best fits the need and desired outcome of the event. In person, meetings must follow all other mitigation strategies including the option to wear of face mask/face shield, maintaining 6ft distance between individuals, and health screening.
Vaccinations	SCS strongly encourages all eligible individuals to get vaccinated to prevent the spread of COVID and the development of variants. At this time SCS will not mandate vaccinations for staff or students.



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