



## **2023-2024 Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan**

*Updated June, 2023*

### **DISTRICT PRIORITIES**

We are in an evolving health situation that requires that the Abilene ISD partner in good faith with local, state, and national health experts to put the best interests of the students, faculty and staff at the center of every decision. The best educational experience for our students is in-person instruction and, therefore, our goal is to continue with face-to-face instruction and provide our students with the most normal school experiences in the safest and healthiest ways possible.

This document outlines the protocols that are currently in place. This guide will be adjusted to fit the changing health situation in our community, state and country. The primary priority each day is the health and safety of the students and staff in the AISD, and that priority is the driving force behind these guidelines.

### **SECTION I: School Health Guidelines**

COVID continues to be a health risk and we are challenged with the task of providing our students the best and most normal educational experiences while ensuring that they occur in a safe and healthy environment. That will be accomplished by providing appropriate layers of protocols that have been shown to mitigate the spread of COVID. In this section we will discuss the health guidelines that will remain in place in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID in our campuses while continuing to provide our students with rich educational experiences.

#### **Face Coverings/Masks**

The use of face coverings/masks is optional but will be encouraged in cases where an individual is returning to school or work after meeting the 5 day quarantine requirement for being COVID positive. While opinions vary, personal choice about mask wearing is always to be respected by staff, students, parents, and visitors.

- Abilene ISD will continue to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for all employees and students.
- Campus clinics will have facial coverings/masks and other PPE items available for any employee or student upon request.
- Per GA-38, school systems cannot require students or staff to wear a mask. GA-38 addresses government-mandated face coverings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Student Health**

- All parents are responsible for ensuring that a daily self-screening of each student occurs prior to going to school or boarding school transportation. Self-screening includes parents checking their child's temperature and identifying the presence of symptoms of COVID-19 prior to leaving home for school. Symptoms of COVID-19 include the following: feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees, loss of taste or smell, cough, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, chills, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, shaking or exaggerated shivering, significant muscle pain or ache, diarrhea, and nausea or vomiting.
- Any child with a fever at or above 100.0 (as established by the Texas Department of State Health Services) or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not report to campus.
- To the extent possible, students should practice appropriate social distancing, as well as hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette (i.e. cough/sneeze into arm, cover mouth with tissue, etc.).
- Students will be trained in self-sanitization techniques and, where applicable, participate in scheduled hand washing times throughout the day. Where hand washing is not feasible, students will utilize hand sanitizer as needed.
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- Students are encouraged to bring their own reusable water bottle for use throughout the day and expected to take water bottles home to be cleaned on a regular basis.

## **Employee Health**

- All Abilene ISD employees will be required to self-screen prior to going to work. Self-screening includes checking temperature and identifying the presence of symptoms of COVID-19 prior to leaving home. Symptoms of COVID-19 include the following: feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees, loss of taste or smell, cough, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, chills, sore throat, congestion, or runny nose, shaking or exaggerated shivering, significant muscle pain or ache, diarrhea, and nausea or vomiting. If employees have any of these symptoms, they should contact their immediate supervisor for guidance.
- Employees will practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette (i.e. cough/sneeze into arm, cover mouth with tissue, etc.). This includes hand washing throughout the day, either with soap and water or sanitizer.

## **COVID-19 VACCINES**

The Abilene ISD has partnered with the Abilene-Taylor County Public Health District to provide clinics at campuses prior to the start of the school year. The AISD will continue this partnership throughout the year in an effort to facilitate the voluntary vaccination of every eligible student, staff and community member.

## **Campus Sanitization**

- Sanitization stations will be in place throughout the campus to give students, staff and visitors the opportunity to sanitize their hands both entering and leaving the building.
- Campuses will be cleaned and sanitized daily, focusing on major touch entry points in common areas such as desks, counter tops, door handles and doorknobs, chairs, light switches, and soap dispensers. The custodial staff on each campus will thoroughly sanitize the campus at the end of the instructional day.
- Classrooms will be provided with hand sanitizer that students may use when entering and leaving rooms, as well as during the class period. Classrooms with sinks will give students another option for hand-washing during the period.

- Signage for proper hygiene practices will be posted throughout campuses and other facilities, in restrooms, and at the entrances. |

## **Facility Ventilation**

To provide students and staff with the highest possible air quality in AISD facilities, the district is in the process of upgrading from MERV 8 to MERV 13 air filters.

## **Classroom Procedures**

- Teachers will ensure that individual space will be provided for students to keep personalized supplies in the classroom.
- Supplies will not be shared unless they are sanitized between use.

## **Building Procedures**

- All buildings will post self-screening and mitigation practices.
- Thorough building sanitization by custodial staff will occur daily.
- Isolation areas for students or staff showing COVID-19 symptoms will be identified.

## **Response to a Positive COVID-19 Case on Campus**

Abilene ISD will follow the guidelines provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and our local public health entities to appropriately respond to a positive COVID-19 case on campus. AISD will coordinate with local public health entities to determine appropriate actions based on the facts of the individual case as needed and the scientific understanding of how the virus spreads. AISD will communicate with the local health department, parents, students, staff, and other parties in accordance with the Texas Education Agency requirements described below.

### *Required Actions if Individuals with Test-Confirmed Cases Have Been in a School*

If an individual who has been in a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify its local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Upon receipt of information that any teacher, staff member, student, or visitor at a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must submit a report to the Texas Department of State Health Services via an online form.

### *Classroom/Grade Level Isolation and Quarantine*

In consultation with the local health department and our medical advisor the following procedures will be followed when multiple test-confirmed COVID positive students are reported in a classroom, cohort, grade level or campus.

- The district will closely monitor when multiple test-confirmed positive COVID cases occur within a grade level, cohort, and campus. Decisions regarding isolation and quarantine will be made on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the health department and medical advisors.

## **Students Test-Confirmed with or Presenting Symptoms of COVID-19** *(Updated August 16, 2022)*

- As provided in this Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Rule, school systems must exclude students from attending school in person who have or are suspected of having COVID-19, and must

immediately notify parents if this is determined while on campus. As noted in the rule, exclusion shall continue until the conditions for re-entry are met:

- For children with symptoms, at least 5 days have passed since symptom onset, and fever free, and other symptoms have improved.
- Children who test positive for COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms must stay home until at least 5 days after the day they were tested.
- Parents must ensure they do not send a child to school on campus if the child has COVID-19 symptoms or is test-confirmed with COVID-19, until the conditions for re-entry are met.

### **Employees Test-Confirmed with or Presenting Symptoms of COVID-19** *(updated August 16, 2022)*

Employees who are actively sick with COVID-19 or who have received a positive test result for COVID-19 will not be permitted to report to work until return-to-work criteria is met.

- The return-to-work criteria for employees who are test-confirmed COVID-19 is as follows:
  - If symptomatic, they may return to work after 5 days have passed since symptom onset, they are fever free\*, and their other symptoms have improved. Employees will be encouraged to wear a mask for an additional five days.
  - Employees who are asymptomatic must stay home until at least 5 days after the day they were tested. However, the employee must meet the return-to-work criteria in the previous bullet if he/she becomes symptomatic.
- The return-to-work criteria for employees who have COVID-19-like symptoms:
  - Employees may be permitted to return to work once they are fever free\*, have improved symptoms and they have a negative COVID test.
  - With a documented alternate diagnosis from a medical health professional, employees may be re-admitted once they are fever free and they have improved symptoms.

\*Fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever suppressing medications. Fever is a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit (37.8° Celsius) or higher.

### **Definition of Close Contact**

According to the CDC, a primary close contact is defined as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes). An infected person can spread COVID-19 starting from two (2) days before they have any symptoms (or, for asymptomatic patients, two (2) days before the positive specimen collection date), until they meet criteria for discontinuing home isolation as described below.

*Exception: In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.*

- Several factors can influence a person’s risk of exposure to COVID-19, including the type, proximity, and duration of their exposure, environmental factors (such as crowding and ventilation), vaccination status, prior COVID-19 infection, and mask use.
- Fully vaccinated individuals or individuals who were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last three months and who are considered close contacts are not required to quarantine.

## **Students Who Are Close Contacts**

- According to the Texas Education Agency, close contact determinations are generally based on guidance outlined by the CDC, which notes that individuals who are vaccinated are not considered close contacts. Given the data from 2020-21 showing very low COVID-19 transmission rates in a classroom setting and data demonstrating lower transmission rates among children than adults, school systems are not required to conduct COVID-19 contact tracing. The Abilene ISD will in some instances perform courtesy contact tracing and may notify parents if their child is considered a close contact.
- If the Abilene ISD is made aware that a student is a close contact, the district will notify the student's parents.

## **Employees Who Are Close Contacts**

- All employees considered close contacts should inform their immediate supervisor prior to reporting to work.
- Employees considered primary close contacts who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic will be permitted to work and will be encouraged to closely monitor their symptoms. They may test for COVID regularly and are encouraged to utilize a face covering.
- Employees considered primary close contacts who are not fully vaccinated and are symptomatic may be required to quarantine until symptoms improve and they are fever free for at least 24 hours. A negative COVID test with improved symptoms could reduce the number of quarantine days.
- Symptomatic close contacts who are fully vaccinated may be required to quarantine until symptoms improve and they are fever free for at least 24 hours. A negative COVID test with improved symptoms could reduce the number of quarantine days.

## **Identifying Possible COVID-19 Cases on Campus**

- Areas used by the individual who shows COVID-19 symptoms while at school (student, teacher, or staff) will be cleaned and sanitized as soon as possible.
- Students who report feeling feverish should be given an immediate temperature check to determine if they are symptomatic for COVID-19.
- Decisions regarding the closure of classrooms or campuses will be made in coordination with the local health department and other medical advisors.

## **SECTION II: Situational Safety Guidelines**

It is essential to create a healthy and safe learning environment for students and staff whenever possible by limiting exposure to COVID-19. Creating this environment begins with transportation to campus, includes visits and deliveries to campuses or other district facilities, transition protocols, meal service, and arrival/dismissal procedures. We must all work together to create that safe environment on each AISD campus and facility throughout the school year. Each campus will establish guidelines for greeting visitors and how they will be screened.

To limit COVID-19 exposure and promote social distancing, guidelines governing arrival and dismissal of students, as well as transitions between classes on each campus, have been put in place. The following section details the ways the AISD is working to promote safety when students and staff are moving throughout buildings and campuses.

### **Transportation**

- As a response to COVID-19, the Abilene ISD encourages all families to transport students to and from school if possible.
- Bus seating will be assigned for all students. Generally, seats will be assigned in the order that students board, beginning with the seats at the back and progressing forward.
- When possible, siblings or students residing in the same household will be seated together.
- Each bus will be sanitized regularly.
- When possible, windows and roof vents will be opened while the bus is operating to increase the fresh air flow through the bus. Air conditioners will continue to be used in conjunction with the open windows.
- Close coordination between the campus and transportation will occur to ensure the orderly, structured, and safe loading and unloading of students.
- To the extent that they can occur with minimal risk of exposure to COVID, every effort will be made to permit academic field trips. All field trips must be approved by the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction.

### **Parents, Visitors, and Deliveries** *(updated Aug. 16, 2022)*

- Abilene ISD will allow visitors and volunteers on campuses if they are willing to abide by certain health, security and safety protocols.
- To the extent that campuses can accommodate (considering space limitations and other factors), parents and/or legal guardians will be permitted to have lunch with their child if they are willing to abide by certain health, security and safety protocols.
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### **Arrival**

- Staff and students are expected to conduct a COVID-19 daily self-screening prior to going to school each morning.
- Parents will not be permitted to walk students inside the school.
- Multiple entry points will be established (where applicable).
- Parents are encouraged to avoid dropping off students too early. Student drivers will also be encouraged to avoid early arrival.
- Staggered arrival and release will be instituted wherever possible. Additional staff supervision will be scheduled as available.

### **Dismissal**

- Multiple exit points will be established (where applicable).
- Additional staff supervision will be scheduled as available.
- Campuses will implement staggered release procedures (where applicable).
- Parents will be encouraged to pick up students immediately after school. Student drivers and those walking home will be encouraged to leave campus immediately.
- Distribution of student groupings will be utilized to reduce crowd sizes. Types of groups include students walking home, students riding the bus, and students who are being transported by car.

### **Transitioning**

- Work areas will be sanitized regularly.

- Indoor traffic patterns/schedules will be established throughout the campus to separate individuals to the greatest extent possible.
- Students will be encouraged to move directly from one class to the next without congregating in the hallway during transitions.
- Considerations will be made at all levels based on student needs.

### **Meal Service**

All Student Nutrition staff will use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) while performing job responsibilities and will be trained to practice health and hygiene regulations. Parents may wish to make online payments for a la carte purchases in order to reduce exchange of cash at the point of service.

### **Breakfast and Lunch**

- Cafeteria and serving areas will be cleaned and sanitized during student transition times.
- Students may be assigned seating at the elementary and middle school level.

### **Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs**

In accordance with the CDC, the Abilene ISD will provide accommodations, modifications, and assistance for students, teachers and staff with disabilities and other health care needs when implementing COVID-19 safety protocols:

- Work with families to better understand the individual needs of students with disabilities.
- Remain accessible for students with disabilities:
  - Help provide access for direct service providers (e.g., paraprofessionals, therapists, early intervention specialists, mental health and healthcare consultants, and others). If DSPs who are not fully vaccinated provide services at more than one location, ask whether any of their other service locations have had COVID-19 cases.
  - Ensure access to services for students with disabilities when developing cohorts.
- Adjust strategies as needed
  - Be aware that physical distancing and wearing masks where recommended or required can be difficult for young children and people with certain disabilities (for example, visual or hearing impairments) or for those with sensory or cognitive issues.
  - For people who are not fully vaccinated and only able to wear masks some of the time for the reasons above, prioritize having them wear masks during times when it is difficult to separate students and/or teachers and staff (e.g., while standing in line or during drop off and pick up).
  - Consider having teachers and staff who are not fully vaccinated wear a clear or cloth mask with a clear panel when interacting with young students, students learning to read, or when interacting with people who rely on reading lips.
  - Use behavioral techniques (such as modeling and reinforcing desired behaviors and using picture schedules, timers, visual cues, and positive reinforcement) to help all students adjust to transitions or changes in routines.

## **SECTION III: Instructional Plan**

### **Instruction Model**

- All learning in the Abilene ISD will occur in person for the 2023-2024 school year.

### **Specialized Programs**

Students in specialized programs including but not limited to Special Education, Section 504, Dyslexia, ELL, Dual Language, GT, CTE or Dual Credit will continue to receive appropriate support. Individual education plans, accommodations and modifications will be followed.

## **Social and Emotional Needs for Students and Staff**

The Abilene ISD employs counselors on each campus who are available to assist students. In addition, a team of social workers is also equipped to address the needs of families. Please feel free to contact these support personnel as needs arise.

## **SECTION IV: Additional Guidelines**

### **Registration and New Student Enrollment**

- Registration and enrollment will be virtual whenever feasible. To register your student, a new student or a transfer student, please go to the AISD website ([www.abileneisd.org](http://www.abileneisd.org)).
- Appointments will be scheduled as needed to complete the process including the selection of student schedules.
- Appointments may be by phone, Zoom, or in person. Documents may be mailed to the campus or dropped off at a secure location/drop box.

### **Scheduling, Open House and Meet the Teacher**

- School personnel will make contact with parents and students through virtual means, phone, or by appointments to ensure accurate scheduling of students.
- Every effort will be made to create an in-person experience for students meeting their teacher and open house (especially for kindergarten, sixth and ninth grade students). These events might occur for longer periods of time or over several days to reduce the number of individuals on campus at one time.

### **Extracurricular/Non-Academic Activities**

- In-person student assemblies/group activities are essential to the student experience in the AISD.
- Athletics and extracurricular activities will be conducted in alignment with UIL guidelines.
- All UIL indoor extracurricular activities and events may be subject to capacity limitations. When feasible, these activities may be presented via live stream (audio and video).
- No students are allowed to attend indoor extracurricular activities or events as a fan unless accompanied by a parent.
- For all UIL activities, elementary and middle school students will only be allowed to attend with a parent/guardian.
- Every effort will be made to provide students and parents with the most normal yet safe and healthy experiences in person.
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- Clubs and campus organizations will be encouraged to seek safe and healthy ways to meet in person, which might require larger or outdoor venues.