

2023-2024 Grinnell Public Schools Plan for the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

Updated August 21, 2023

The purpose of this document is to communicate to parents, patrons, students, and school employees the procedures and protocols that will help mitigate the risk of spreading the coronavirus. This document replaces the Thunderhawk Crisis Mitigation and School Reopening Plan which was last updated July 2022. This plan outlines the precautions and best practices based on the knowledge of the coronavirus acquired over the past 2 years.

With the current data of the Omicron variant, we must understand that the threat to public health still exists. It is also important to understand there are other viruses linked to respiratory illness that can create a threat to the health and well-being of our schools and community. We must remain vigilant and be prepared to take appropriate steps to safeguard our students, staff, and community. The precautions and safety procedures are based on current knowledge and recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Kansas State Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), and the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE). As always, this mitigation plan is subject to change as new information or guidance is available.

General Guidelines and Safety Practices:

The following guidelines and practices are built upon requirements identified by Congress within the “*American Rescue Plan*.” This plan outlines the district’s adopted safety practices and the steps that have been identified to ensure that the learning environment is maintained with minimal disruption. This section outlines the accepted safety precautions and practices adopted to reduce the risks of severe illness to individuals and the spread of the virus within the school’s population.

- A. Wearing of face masks: From the very start of the pandemic in the USA, the wearing of faces masks has been a hot topic that has caused much controversy. For some, mask mandates are an infringement on their civil rights. For others, refusal to wear a mask is a threat to public safety and demonstrates a disregard for the safety of others. Currently, there are no mask mandates in effect in our region of the state. When the 2020-2021 school year began, there was no opportunity to be proactive regarding a mask mandate. It will be a goal of district and building leaders to educate all staff and students in both the how and the why of wearing face masks.
- B. Adapt Facilities for Physical Distancing: Physical distancing was an effective strategy that was implemented in all our school buildings throughout 2020-2021. The number of staff and students that would occupy any space in the building allowed for appropriate distancing. We intend to build on the knowledge we gained last year to make our distancing efforts even more effective from an academic standpoint as well as for the safety of all students and staff.

Building leadership developed several strategies to limit the numbers of student in common areas (halls during passing periods, lunch lines, cafeteria, etc.) to allow for distancing. Classroom teachers moved furniture such as desks and tables to create enough space for distancing of students.

- C. Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette: Washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water has proven to be an effective measure for helping reduce the spread of disease. It is further advised that proper hand washing at least once per hour is highly effective. Following established guidelines when coughing or sneezing is also highly effective in reducing spread. A cough or sneeze should be covered with a tissue, handkerchief, or a sleeve at the elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed or sanitized immediately.
- D. Maintaining Healthy Facilities: Healthy facilities are an important aspect of preventing the spread of disease. Disinfecting and sanitizing surfaces in common areas and classrooms that accommodate multiple groups of students compliments the handwashing practices outlined above. Custodians make 3 to 4 passes in the hallways each day to sanitized surfaces such as doorknobs, water fountain handles, and other surfaces that are potentially touched by multiple individuals. Classroom teachers also help with sanitizing in their classroom. This takes place during passing periods or when elementary students are out of the room for an extended period (specials such as music or art and recess) Air quality and ventilation is being addressed through the installation of ionizing strips on HVAC units that circulate air.
- E. Contact Tracing: Contact tracing and ordering isolation or quarantine has been a function of the Gove County Health Department. School leaders have cooperated with the local health department(s) when students or staff members were involved. The school district **does not have the authority** to order anyone into quarantine or to lift a quarantine order.
- F. Diagnostic and Screening Testing: The school district has screened all individuals entering our building. This included faculty, staff, students, and visitors. Bus route drivers also screened students as they were boarding the bus in the morning. The screening consists primarily of a temperature check. The individuals conducting the screening were permitted to ask basic questions if there was an indication of possible illness. The district may also investigate the program being developed by KDHE through the grant from the CDC.
- G. Vaccinations for School Communities: The district has not tried to promote vaccination to our students or staff. With more vaccines proving to be safe and effective for youth as well as adults, the school will be working in collaboration with county health to determine if it will be beneficial and practical to host a vaccination clinic at one of our schools.
- H. Special Accommodations for Special Needs Students: As always, the district and school buildings will work with and abide by the IEP of all special needs students. We will also abide by any 504 plan developed to address other types of disabilities. Efforts will be made to

ensure students are in the least restrictive environment and to accommodate students in a manner that allows them the participate in learning activities with their peers.

- I. Coordination with Health Officials: In August of 2020, the county health officer and nurse attended the USD 291 board meeting to share thoughts and suggestions regarding the district's school opening plan. Since that time, school leaders have maintained a working relationship with county health officials to help ensure the school was supporting public health practices.

Ensuring Continuity of Services:

This section provides an overview of the districts' intent and proposed strategies for ensuring the academic needs and the physical and mental health needs for all students and staff are being addressed.

- A. Services Addressing Student Academic Needs: The district acknowledges that students have suffered academically since the onset of the pandemic. It is our plan to utilize federal relief funds to hire additional staff who will take on the responsibility to develop and implement student instructional supports to address learning loss and learning that did not take place because of school closure and remote learning. These staff members will help identify resources to screen students for academic shortfalls as well as strategies to help struggling students as needed.
- B. Social-Emotional and Mental Health of Students and Staff: District and School leadership have been searching and researching various social-emotion learning curriculum. As decisions are made related to SEL, it will be imperative that practices are implemented schoolwide with efficacy. Based on our research and recommendations from other school leaders and teachers, we have decided to pursue the program resource Fast Bridge. A primary factor in this decision is that it can be used to provide extra support in academics as well as social-emotional learning.
- C. Other Student Health Needs: The district employs a part time nurse who helps coordinated vision and hearing screenings along with other nursing duties such as tracking immunizations and general health issues as time allows. The district has participated in food service programs that help ensure that all students receive nutritious meals.