

# Oriskany Central School District

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Dear Parents, Guardians, Families and Community Members,

I hope this letter finds you well and that everyone is continuing to remain safe, healthy and enjoying the summer months with friends, family and loved ones. As you may be aware, COVID–19 continues to impact many across the country including our Oneida County region. In addition, the pandemic also continues to impact decision making with regard to the reopening of schools. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID data tracker lists the Oneida County region as high risk.

Please know, we have been provided information and guidance from the governor's office, the New York State Department of Health, County Executive Anthony J. Picente and the New York State Department of Education, that schools should develop opening plans based on the latest guidelines from the CDC.

We will continue to use these guidelines as a basis for our operations and decision making moving forward into the school year. As you may know, these guidelines are subject to change at a moment's notice based upon many factors including specifically designated high or substantial areas of COVID transmission.

We will continue to edit and modify our plans to ensure alignment with CDC guidelines and that they are revised accordingly and based upon local data (CDC COVID data tracker), ongoing guidance from the NYSDOH, Oneida County DOH, NYSED and the advisement and guidance of our school Physician Dr. Christopher Alinea.

We are committed to keeping school open five days per week for live, in-person learning and to do so in the safest way possible for all students, staff, families and community members.

In its July 27 guidance, the CDC recommends that vaccinated (and unvaccinated) persons wear masks in public settings and in communities identified at/above substantial risk. Additionally, the CDC recently issued "Guidance for COVID–19 Prevention in K-12 Schools," which recommends universal indoor masking for all students, staff, teachers and visitors to K-12 schools. This includes wearing a mask, regardless of vaccination status or distancing.

With that being said, respectfully, I wanted to update everyone on where we stand currently in regards to the upcoming school year:

- The first day of school for students will be September 7, 2021. We will return to a five-day week for in-person learning.

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- N.A. Walbran Elementary School and the Jr./Sr. High School will see all students returning to in-person learning each day. Each building will follow their normal, pre-COVID building schedule.
- Transportation will be provided to all students who wish to use this service. Students must wear a mask if they are utilizing bus transportation to and from school, and during extracurricular activities, including athletics (games and practices). Pursuant to the CDC's order, physical distancing is not required on school buses.
- Currently, athletic programs are set to run on a normal schedule with league, section and state competition returning as per the NYS Athletic Association. Locker room facilities will not be made available for visiting teams. All fall sports, excluding gymnastics, are outside events. No masks will be required for spectators. However, social distancing will be encouraged and spectators that have not been vaccinated should be wearing a mask as per CDC guidelines.
- There will be no remote learning option this school year unless otherwise directed by the NYSED. So long as allowed by public health officials, schools should be open for in-person teaching and learning and students should be in school.
  - In case of school closures due to a declared public health emergency, schools must be prepared to provide remote instruction.
  - While the Department will not require schools that are open for full-time, in-person instruction to provide on-line or remote instruction, districts may work with students and families to offer remote options if it is deemed to be in the best educational interest of the student.
- Students who attend BOCES programs will return to the normal pre-pandemic schedules, unless otherwise noted by OHM BOCES.
- Physical distancing - The CDC recommends that schools maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing, to reduce the transmission of COVID. Oriskany Central School District will employ a minimum of three feet social distancing with required masking and employ a distance of at least six feet when possible and practical.
  - Intermittent mask breaks will be allowed for students throughout the school day.
  - Students and staff will not be required to wear a mask for outdoor activities but will be required to adhere to social distancing as appropriate and practical.
- Cafeteria - The CDC states that permitting large groups of students to eat in the cafeteria should be based on community transmission rates. Schools should maximize physical distance as much as possible when students are moving through the food service line and while eating (especially indoors). Students will be spaced six feet apart while eating in the cafeteria or other designated eating areas.
- Temperature and questionnaire screenings - The CDC no longer recommends temperature screenings or screening questionnaires at school. However, schools should be proactive that children experiencing COVID symptoms should be tested.
  - Families should be reminded and encouraged to be mindful of indications their children may exhibit symptoms of COVID- and to seek testing when such symptoms are present.

- Students and school personnel should stay home if they are showing signs and symptoms of infectious illness, including COVID, and get tested.
  - The District will not be collecting daily health surveys from parents or staff. Parents will be encouraged to self-monitor and screen for COVID symptoms prior to their child(ren) attending school each day. If the child is not feeling well, or is exhibiting COVID like symptoms, the child should remain home and consult with their pediatrician.
  - Schools should encourage everyone in their school community to get tested when symptoms are compatible with COVID, as this will help with rapid contact tracing and prevent the spread of COVID at school.
- Contact tracing – Oriskany Central School District will consult with the local Oneida County DOH should an exposure or contact tracing efforts need to be employed within the District.
    - According to the CDC, people who are fully vaccinated do NOT need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID unless they have symptoms. However, fully vaccinated people should get tested 3-5 days after their exposure, even if they do not have symptoms, and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.
    - The District will look at each case on an individual basis and consult with the local health department to determine process and procedure.
  - As always, these requirements may be modified at any time according to updated guidance or changes to our local COVID status. We will continue to review these and other CDC recommendations with our administrative and safety teams, and continue to seek guidance from our local Oneida County DOH and school medical director when reviewing and/or revising our District plan.

I understand the burden and additional stress COVID has brought to our school, our region and our families, and I appreciate the information that some community members have sent to me regarding universal masking. I have received multiple perspectives regarding this topic. Please know, our area is currently categorized as a high risk area and the COVID pandemic is not over.

By working together and following the recommended safety standards, we can continue to protect the health and well-being of our students, staff, families and community members.

I will keep you updated more often now as we move forward and I thank you for your understanding, cooperation, patience and continued support as we plan for a safe return to school.

Respectfully,

Timothy Gaffney  
Superintendent of Schools