Summary of the Sauquoit Valley Central School District
COVID Reopening Plan

2021-22 School Year

The Sauquoit Valley reopening plan for the 2021-22 school year is developed with the priority of getting all students back to school in-person. We believe that our students benefit greatly from being in the classroom, in-person, with their teachers, as opposed to a hybrid, virtual, or remote mode of instruction. The District provides a safe and supportive learning environment that supports our efforts in providing the necessary resources to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of our students. These needs are best met when students have the opportunity to learn from our teachers, face to face, and can access resources in the same manner to meet their individual needs. The District’s reopening plan was developed in accordance to recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, the New York State Education Department, and the Oneida County Department of Health. Additionally, we acknowledged the recommendations from pediatricians in the Utica-Rome area, as well as, from Upstate Medical in Syracuse (See Appendices A and B).

The District reopening plan employs multiple prevention strategies to protect our staff and students against the transmission of COVID-19 at school. This plan mirrors the plan that we ended the 2020-21 school year with. This layered approach to mitigate the impact COVID-19 has within the school community includes multiple strategies such as:

- Vaccination
- Wearing Masks
- Physical Distancing
- Health Screening (done at home daily)
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and disinfecting
- Ventilation
- Student grouping where applicable (i.e. lunch/recess at elementary school)
- Contract tracing, isolation, and quarantining

As our knowledge of the COVID-19 virus continues to evolve, we do know that the implementation of multiple mitigation strategies will assist in containing the spread of the virus. Most importantly, these strategies will provide us the greatest opportunity to maintain in-person instruction throughout the school year.

What was extremely helpful and essential last year to operate school under multiple instructional modes, was the cooperation and coordination we had with our families. Unlike last year, we have the opportunity to open school for all students to attend in-person with the goal to maintain this mode of instruction throughout the school year. With this in mind, and the potential of the increasing positivity rate of COVID-19 in Oneida County, we must do all that we can to minimize transmission within our school.
community; as well as, minimize the need for quarantines that will be mandated by the Oneida County Department of Health to keep our staff and students healthy and in school.

Therefore, the following updates to our school reopening plan for the 2021-22 school year were approved at the August 17, 2021, Board of Education meeting:

**Masking:**
- All staff, students, and visitors will be required to wear a mask indoors regardless of vaccination status. Exception: Individuals unable to do so due to a disability or documented medical reason.
- The District will provide masks as needed.
- Masks will be optional for all outside activities and physical distancing is to be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- Unvaccinated persons participating in a larger outdoor gatherings or activities that involve sustained contact with other people will need to wear a mask (i.e. sporting or other school events.) Physical distancing in such cases should be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- Teachers may implement short mask breaks provided students can be physically distanced 6 feet or greater.

**Vaccinations:**
- COVID vaccines are encouraged for those age 12 and older.
- The District is willing to host vaccination clinics as needed.
- We will ask that students and staff voluntarily share their vaccination status, which can support our efforts to modify our reopening plan as needed.

**Physical Distancing:**
- At least 3 feet of distancing between students and staff will be maintained. Staff should maintain 6 feet of distance between students as much as possible.
- Where possible, 6 feet of distancing will be maintained in the classroom for those who may be immunocompromised.
- 6 feet of physical distancing is to be maintained in the cafeterias.
- Unvaccinated staff should maintain 6 feet of distancing from other staff members.
- 6 feet of physical distancing for band, choir, and physical education.
- Masking requirements are to be followed as noted above.

**Transportation:**
- Parents will be encouraged to transport their children to the extent possible.
- Masks must be worn on buses for all riders (students, adults, bus driver).
- Mass transit physical distancing recommendations will be followed. Two students per seat may be permitted; however, where possible students will be spread out further.
- Windows will lowered to increase ventilation when the weather permits us to do so.
Cleaning/Disinfecting:
- Increased cleaning/disinfecting will take place at least once per day, more if staffing permits.
- High touch surfaces will be cleaned/disinfected to the extent possible throughout the day.

Daily Screenings:
- Staff will self-screen at home each day following the health screening checklist located under “Quick Links” on the school website.
- Parents will screen their children each day prior to sending them to school following the health screening checklist located under “Quick Links” on the schools website.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette:
- Proper hand washing and frequent hand sanitizing will be encouraged throughout each school day.
- Students and staff will be reminded of the proper respiratory etiquette when coughing or sneezing.
- Signage will be posted throughout each school building to promote proper hygiene practices.

Ventilation:
- Increased ventilation will be maintained in all buildings to the greatest extent possible.

COVID Testing:
- Random testing is recommended of staff and students and may occur pending availability of resources and testing kits.
- The District may engage in pool testing should that option become available.

Quarantines:
- We will continue to follow protocols set forth by the Department of Health.
- Fully vaccinated individuals who are considered a close contact should be tested 3-5 days after an exposure to a confirmed or suspected COVID diagnosis and should wear a mask in all indoor settings for a period of 14 days or until a negative test result. If vaccinated and test positive, one must isolate. Most fully vaccinated individuals with no COVID-like symptoms do not need to quarantine following an exposure if they follow all testing and masking requirements.
- Unvaccinated adults considered to be close contacts of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 may be expected to quarantine for 10 days, pending review of the case by the Oneida County Department of Health.
- Close contact as defined by the CDC: Anyone within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
- **Exception to Close Contact Rule:** students in the K-12 classroom setting who are within 3 to 6 feet of an infected person, would not be considered a close
contact, and would not have to quarantine, provided the infected person and exposed person were wearing a mask the entire time, and as long as they remain symptom free.

**Instructional Model:**
- So long as we are permitted to do so by our local and state Department of Health, and the State Education Department, we will provide in-person instruction for all students throughout the school year. There will not be an unrestricted option for remote/virtual instruction.
- Should we need to revert to 100% remote instruction, students will be provided Chromebooks and internet access as needed to support their remote learning needs.

**Other Considerations:**
- Individuals with flu-like symptoms are to remain at home and will be sent home if entering school with such symptoms. A COVID negative test result or note from medical provider may be required to return to school.
- We will continuously monitor positivity rates in the county and surrounding community to reassess our plan on an on-going basis.

**Note:** For building specific reopening information, please refer to each building’s reopening addendums that are posted on the home page of the school website.

In conclusion, we do recognize that some of the recommendations noted above may not meet everyone’s approval. We acknowledge and understand the desire of parents to be able to make decisions that they feel are in the best interest of their children and families. While we do respect this desire, the District must look at the health and safety of our staff and students in a much more global perspective and we feel the best way to do this is through the recommendations provided to us by the institutions noted earlier in this summary. Our focus remains on maintaining our in-person instructional model throughout the school year and with your continued support and perseverance we believe we can achieve this. As this pandemic continues to evolve, we may receive new or updated guidance to consider moving forward. We will continue to monitor and reassess our plan, as needed, with consideration given to any new recommendations, mandates, and transmission rates within the County. We wish our students, staff, and families a safe, healthy and successful school year.
Appendix A

Dear School and Community Leaders,

As local pediatricians, we continue to see firsthand the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 virus on children and their families. In our offices, we have treated patients who are sick with COVID symptoms. Some of them have needed hospitalization for severe cases and complications. We have watched as students, including many with special needs, missed out on in-person instruction and school services because of the pandemic. More and more teenagers have been coming to us with depression and anxiety as they struggle to maintain routines and connect with others. On a daily basis, we work with parents who are overwhelmed with the stresses and fears this pandemic has brought on their families.

With these experiences in mind, our pediatric groups strongly recommend that local school districts follow the current CDC and AAP guidelines for universal masking, physical distancing, and other measures that have been proven effective in slowing the spread of the COVID virus. We understand that following these guidelines can feel like an inconvenience. We have worn masks every day at work for the past seventeen months because we know it helps protect our patients and their families.

In addition, we highly recommend vaccinations for everyone who is eligible. Numerous scientific studies have proven these vaccines to be safe and effective. The vaccine not only protects the people who get it, but also those around them, particularly children under 12 who are not yet eligible. Without higher vaccination rates, the virus will continue to spread and mutate, prolonging a pandemic we all want to end.

This is not a political issue. Our job as pediatricians is to promote the health and wellbeing of the children and families in our community. Full time, in-person instruction is a goal we share with educators, who we know are working extremely hard to create the safest possible environment for student learning. The CDC and AAP have stated that mask wearing, physical distancing, and vaccines are the best ways to help slow the spread of COVID. For the safety of children in our area, we hope that local school districts and community leaders will follow this critical guidance.

Sincerely,
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August 11, 2021

To: Central New York School Superintendents

In a few weeks, children all over Central New York will return to school. As pediatricians, infectious disease physicians, and public health experts from Upstate Medical University and the community, our goal is to ensure that all children can safely return to school in person, full time, and participate in after school activities and sports. We advocate to minimize the risk for COVID-19 infection and exposure at school which requires lengthy isolation or quarantine, respectively. A safe in-person school attendance is predicated on a universal masking policy for all children and staff. Our recommendations are based on the best medical advice and scientific research available.

What We know:

Delta is the predominant SARS-CoV-2 variant. Delta is more transmissible and possibly causes more serious disease compared to the original virus and its new variants. Data indicate that the Delta variant is 40 to 60 percent more transmissible than Alpha and almost twice as transmissible as the original SARS-CoV-2 virus. As an example, Delta variant is more contagious than other viruses like Ebola, common cold, flu, and smallpox.

Delta led to a surge in hospitalization and death among unvaccinated. Currently, more than 97 percent of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units or patients dying from COVID-19 are infected with the Delta variant. To make things worse, younger adults and now children are being hospitalized in greater numbers. Many children are not eligible for vaccination given their age. They are particularly susceptible to infection unless they are protected by mask. In addition, control and prevention protocol are important: hand washing, not attending school when sick, keeping physical distance, and staying in well ventilated areas whenever possible.

The Delta variant puts everyone at increased risk. Those who have been vaccinated are still protected against moderate and serious illness and death. However, protection is not 100 percent. Vaccinated people can still get infected and be contagious to others, particularly if they are unmasked and in poorly ventilated and crowded settings. Unvaccinated people are at risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and death. They also remain the main driver of COVID-19 in the communities around them. Vaccination with COVID vaccine is the best way to prevent serious COVID-19 and stop the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, children under the age of 12 years are not eligible for vaccination, making universal masking crucial to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection.
What we recommend to stay safe:

**Masking is a proven way to keep children safe from COVID-19**, especially when children are indoors at school. There is abundant evidence that shows masking protects children and adults from COVID-19, including the Delta variant. It is recommended by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Public Health Association, as well as most respected medical organizations.

We all are part of this community and we care deeply about the health of our neighbors, our patients, and all children. We recognize the importance of in person education and social interactions for children. Safe return to school must be coupled with universal masking to avoid school closures, and exclusion of exposed or infected children. The cost of COVID-19 infection and stress associated with testing of children cannot be underestimated, and should be carefully considered as schools are finalizing their masking policies. **Masked children are less likely to be exposed, and less likely to require testing.** They are also less likely to be infected, and require isolation and exclusion from school. Our unequivocal recommendation is for every school district to institute universal mask wearing requirement for children and staff. Masking in schools will help keep our children and our community safe.

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