



MOUNTAINSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Road Forward - Fall 2021

**This plan was created in accordance with current
Executive Orders and NJDOH / NJDOE Guidance and
is subject to change
(Updated - 8/24/21)**

Mountainside's plan features full-day, in-person learning, every day.

On Monday, May 18, 2021, Governor Murphy announced schools must fully open for in-person instruction in the fall, and virtual learning will not be an option in New Jersey.

Our Road Forward Plan was created in accordance with current Executive Orders and NJDOH / NJDOE Guidance and is subject to change

The Mountainside Reopening Committee which included representatives from the Board of Education, teaching staff, administration, and parents met to discuss and address all critical areas of operation within the Road Forward Plan. This plan was designed with a commitment to providing students with as regular a school day as possible in a manner that fully supports their academic and emotional needs, while keeping everyone's health and safety in mind.

Core Principles Guiding the Mountainside "Road Forward"

1. Health and Safety - for all students and staff
2. Engagement - shall be ongoing among all community groups
3. Learning - will uphold the integrity of our instructional program
4. Inclusivity - to ensure equitable access for all students
5. Wellness - prioritize social and emotional needs and development
6. Empathy - caring for one another

Remember!
Health
Screening
Today

Screening

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Mountainside School District will continue to safely and respectfully screen students and employees for symptoms of and history of exposure to COVID-19.

- Parents/guardians & faculty will be required to complete a **monthly** “COVID-19 Self-Screening Attestation Form”. This form will attest to their responsibility to monitor their children/themselves everyday prior to arrival at school for signs of infectious illness including but not limited to COVID-19.
- Students and staff will be visually screened for symptoms upon arrival. Screenings will take into consideration students’ developmental levels and any known disabilities and accommodations.
 - Any student exhibiting symptoms upon arrival, or during the school day, will be referred to the health office. The nurse will conduct an examination and make the best determination for the safety and well-being of all students and staff.
- If a staff member feels ill or is experiencing any of the identified symptoms of COVID-19, they are encouraged to stay home. If they feel any of these symptoms after their arrival to school, they should see the school nurse immediately.
- Individuals who meet the exclusion criteria, based upon identified symptoms, must receive a negative COVID-19 test prior to returning to school.



Masking



Masking requirements will be implemented in accordance with guidance in place at the time that school is in session. Currently, [Executive Order 251](#) is in effect. *This Order has been affirmed by our Board attorney, NJDOE, the Union County Superintendent, the Westfield Regional Health Department, and the New Jersey School Boards Association.*

School staff, students, and visitors are required to wear a face mask at all times when indoors, and on school buses, regardless of vaccination status

- Limited exceptions to these requirements are noted within the Executive Order.
- Face masks may be removed when the individual is engaged in an activity that cannot physically be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating or drinking, or playing a musical instrument that would be obstructed by a face mask.
 - Students will be seated at a 6 foot distance during these times
- While outdoors, masks will not be required for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.
- Teachers will continue to incorporate mask breaks and the use of outdoor space for instruction when feasible.



Distancing / Close Contact



- Physical distancing of 6 feet between rows of desks will be implemented to the greatest extent possible in classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms
 - This will be maximized in situations where masks are removed such as snack, lunch, and band/chorus.
 - As instructional needs dictate, students will be allowed to work at closer than 6 feet, but not less than 3 feet, **while masked**.
- Teachers will continue to enforce close contact timelines (Students will not be less than 3 feet from others, with masks on, for greater than 15 minutes cumulative over 24 hours) as per the [CDC's identified close-contact exception](#).
 - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.
 - In any situation where face masks are not worn, the distancing for close contact timelines will be adjusted to the existing 6 feet.

Distancing / Close Contact

- Arrival/Dismissal procedures will be implemented for each building to reduce close contact.
 - Students will be assigned to enter and exit through designated doors.
 - Students will report directly to their homeroom upon entering the building.
 - Staff will monitor the hallways during arrival and dismissal to enforce physical distancing.
 - Pick Up Patrol will continue to be used for Beechwood School.
- Signs will be placed to remind students/staff/visitors of the protocols.
- Cohorts:
 - K-5 students will remain homeroom based to the greatest extent practicable.
 - Middle School and Related Arts will return to regular scheduling practices.
 - Seating charts will be maintained and updated regularly.
 - Mask breaks and outdoor instruction where students can be unmasked will be incorporated as appropriate.
 - PE/Music/Band Classes -- The use of outdoor space will be encouraged as the weather and instructional topic permits.



Lunch & Recess



The District will continue to participate with SSO to provide free lunch for all interested students through June 2022.

- **Students will be spaced 6 feet apart in order to alleviate close contact concerns.**
- For the first month of school lunch options will be limited to 3 choices per day, and a la carte items will not be available, in order to assess flow of service to meet timing, location and schedule needs. The addition of more choices will be reevaluated in October.
- Lunches will take place in various locations. This may include but is not limited to: cafeterias, APR, classrooms, and outdoors.
 - Middle school students may choose where they would like to sit in their designated location.
- Tables & surfaces will be cleaned and sanitized between each meal service.
- Students will be given time to sanitize their hands before and after eating.
- Standard water fountains have been disabled, but refillable bottle stations are available.
- Recess will take place daily and will be supervised by classroom teachers in grades K-5.
 - Masks will not be required when students are outside for recess.



Health & Safety



Students

- Students are encouraged to bring in their own school supplies (Teachers/grade levels have provided suggested item lists).
- Material sharing will be limited where feasible
 - Increased sanitization of shared materials, before used by others, may be implemented if there are increased rates of local transmission
- Students will be encouraged to sanitize their hands after touching shared items such as gym equipment, lab materials, classroom libraries, or art supplies.
- Frequent reminders regarding hand hygiene will occur throughout the day.



Transportation



- For students utilizing our transportation services on a school bus, **face masks are required** to be worn by all students who are able to do so upon entering the bus as per CDC and Federal mandates.
- Assigned seating and social distancing to the greatest extent feasible will continue to be in place.
- Accommodations for students who are unable to wear a cloth face covering will be addressed according to that student's particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.
- Every school bus will be cleaned and disinfected before and after each bus route.
- As Mountainside Public Schools contracts out for transportation services, the contractor shall ensure all Board of Education safety actions and protocols are followed by the contractor and its employees and/or its agents.

Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette

Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette - The Mountainside School District will promote the following behaviors that reduce the spread of contagious viruses such as COVID-19:

- Each instructional and non-instructional room/classroom will be provided with hand sanitizer.
 - All hand sanitizer will meet the minimum requirements of 60% volume of alcohol based solution.
 - There will be hand sanitizing stations located at the main entrances of the buildings, outside of the bathrooms and other commonly used areas.
 - All classrooms that have sinks will be provided with hand soap.
 - Signs promoting proper handwashing will be placed in every bathroom and throughout the school building to promote proper hygiene.
- Frequent hand washing will be scheduled at the staff's discretion and encouraged before and after snack/lunch/recess, using the restroom and any other activity that has students handling any equipment necessary for learning.
- Proper respiratory etiquette will be reinforced through signage, teacher instruction, and reminders from the health office





Building Safety



- The District will continue to adhere to existing required facilities cleaning practices and procedures, and any new specific requirements of the local health department as they arise.
- Mountainside has a procedure manual that establishes cleaning/disinfecting schedules, targeted areas to be cleaned, and identifies methods and materials to be used. The District will have a schedule for increased, routine cleaning and disinfection included in the district's manual.
- The District will routinely clean/disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched. This may include cleaning objects/surfaces such as, doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops, etc...
- Larger rooms may be used for different purposes to allow for physical distancing.
- Windows will be open when feasible to allow for greater air circulation.
- Filters for AC units will be maintained and changed according to manufacturer recommendations. MERV 11 filters will continue to be installed in all central air units.

Building Safety (cont'd)

- Automatic faucets & flushometers have been installed in all bathrooms to complement the automatic soap dispensers. Physical distancing precautions will be in effect in the bathrooms.
- Students and staff will continue to clean desks at the end of any periods where switching of classes will occur.
- Bathrooms will be sanitized daily and cleaned periodically throughout the school day, using protocols outlined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Schools will use isolation areas for students/staff exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.
- Plexiglass barriers will be utilized for areas where avoiding direct contact is not possible, especially for secretaries and office staff.
- PPE will be available in nursing and main offices, but staff and students are encouraged to provide their own face mask that they are most accustomed to wearing.



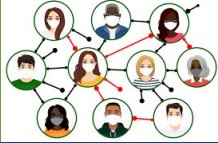
School Activities



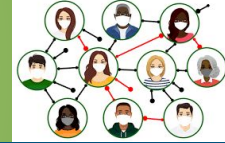
- Extra-curricular activities and athletics will be offered and implemented in accordance with state guidelines and orders. Current guidance can be found here: [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools](#)
- The Board of Education requires any external community organizations that use school facilities to follow district guidance on health and safety protocols.
- Masking requirements will reflect guidelines that are in place for extracurricular activities and sports at the time of the event.
- The current guidance for athletics can be found here: [Guidance for Sports Activities May 28, 2021](#)
- Consideration will be given to scheduling field trips as health and safety guidelines permit.

Parent Meetings / Visitation / Outside Groups

- IEP/504/I&RS meetings will remain virtual unless there is a parental/administrative/CST request for in person.
- Parent/Teacher Conferences -- The District will allow for a remote option during timeslots.
- The District will limit nonessential visitors
 - Any visitors or volunteers who are determined necessary are required to follow all District procedures including masking and social distancing guidelines.
 - Any regularly scheduled district volunteers will need to follow vaccine/testing requirements as outlined in Executive Order #253
- School and PTO activities will be incorporated as feasible within the health and safety guidelines that are in place at the time of the event. Activities may be adapted based upon community transmission.
 - The use of outdoor space is encouraged for events.
- Activities involving external groups or organizations are expected to be allowed within the current guidelines, however, limitations may be enforced due to the pandemic, at the discretion of the Superintendent and local Health Department.



Contact tracing



- In the event of a positive case, or suspected case, the District will implement contact tracing procedures and policies created by the NJDOH and the Regional Health Department.
- The Westfield Regional Health Department will lead the contact tracing efforts in partnership with the school nurses and school district.
- Cohorts will be maintained to the greatest extent possible in Grades PK-5. Schedules for Grades 6-8 will be available to the Health Department and school nurses in the event contact tracing becomes necessary. Seating charts will be maintained and updated regularly.
- Quarantine requirements for students and staff will be followed per state and local procedures in place at the time of reopening.
- Teachers will enforce close contact timelines and distancing expectations.
- The District will continue to maintain regular communication with Westfield Regional Health Department and our school physician. Updates and information will be shared through BOE meeting updates, email blasts, weekly newsletters, and social media.

Exclusion Criteria

- An alternate diagnosis will not be accepted without negative COVID test result.
- Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis - 10 day exclusion from onset of symptoms or positive test result if asymptomatic.
- COVID-19 Exposure: Unvaccinated students/staff who are identified as close contacts will be excluded for a minimum of 7 days isolation (return on day 8) based on current CDC guidance if they receive a negative PCR test day 5-7. Otherwise, 10-day isolation.
 - As per NJDOH guidelines, in the event that the District returns to a high (orange) level of community transmission, close contacts will be excluded for 14 days.
- FULLY vaccinated close contacts **do not** need to quarantine as long as they do not exhibit any symptoms.
 - CDC recommends testing 3-5 days after exposure to a positive individual.
- **Unvaccinated family members of exposed students or staff (“contacts of contacts”)** will no longer be excluded or asked to quarantine, except for the period of time while the close contact is awaiting COVID test results.

Quarantine Remote Instruction

- If the District requires a student to quarantine for exposure to COVID-19 or documentation of a positive case, instruction will be provided virtually, beginning the 2nd day of the verified absence.
 - Instruction will include 5 hours of remote live instruction per week (at least one hour each for the core academic subjects of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and at least 5 additional hours per week of guided learning experiences.
 - Virtual instruction will take place after regular school hours and be provided by a certified teacher.
 - Guided learning experiences may include asynchronous Google Classroom assignments, book work, and/or use of technology to provide audio/visual connections to assignments and instruction.
- This approach will provide more personalized instruction without students having to be in front of the computer for the entire day. It also allows the teacher to continue providing high-quality instruction to all students without having to split time between students in the classroom and those at home.
- Should the entire class/grade need to quarantine, instruction will be provided synchronously to the full group during school hours, following a regular school day schedule.
 - In 7th & 8th grade, where students may be vaccinated, and therefore a portion of the class does not need to quarantine the above instruction may also take place.
- Student vacations are discouraged during the time school is in session and will not result in the provision of remote instruction. Vacations will be considered as unexcused absences.



Testing / Vaccinations



- **Diagnostic Testing:** The Mountainside School District will provide the school community with a list of local agencies that offer COVID testing, within a five-mile radius of Mountainside. This resource will also educate the community on which agencies accept medical insurance and how the uninsured can gain access to testing. This document will also be posted, in English and Spanish, on our school-website for public access.
- The District will inform parents and community of COVID-19 testing and vaccination availability through our website, email blasts, and social media.
- Vaccinations are not required for student attendance or participation in activities.
- Staff vaccination requirements will follow guidelines set forth by [Executive Order #253](#), and will go into effect on October 18, 2021
 - Vaccinated staff are required to show proof of vaccination status
 - Unvaccinated staff must submit proof of COVID-19 screening testing once a week
- Eligible students (over 12 years of age) will be asked to voluntarily provide information on status and proof of vaccination to the school nurses, for the purpose of maintenance of health records in the event of an exposure.
 - All information will remain confidential as aligned with other health information.



Academic Support for Students



The District offers the following academic supports:

- **Universal Supports:** Differentiation of instruction within the classroom delivered by the teacher in their inclusive learning environment.
- **Bridge Between Supports:** Intervention and Referral Services Team (I&RS) will hold meetings as needed based on student referrals/needs Interventions for implementation will be determined upon initial referral and supports will be monitored and evaluated.
- **Targeted Supports:** Academic Support Instruction (AIM) - Students will be identified using multiple measures such as: District benchmark assessments, academic grades, teacher recommendations, and state assessment results (when available and applicable). Program support will be provided by certified teachers.
- **Targeted Supports:** Enrichment/G&T - Students will be identified according to the NJDOE implemented G&T guidelines. Qualification will be determined using multiple measures and identified on the district website: <https://www.mountainsideschools.org/domain/339>
- **Intensive Interventions:** Special Education Supports may be put in place for students who demonstrate a lack of success in Tiers 1 and 2. Level of support is determined by the thorough evaluation by the district's Child Study Team.



Social Emotional Health



The District will provide the following resources for students:

- (Tier 1) Continued use of a District wide social and emotional learning curricular program titled: Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving.
- (Tier 2) Periodic counseling, when needed, provided by the school social worker and/or school psychologist in collaboration with the student(s) and their respective caregivers, individually or in small groups.
 - During the 2021-22 school year, the District will utilize ESSER II funding to partner with Rutgers Behavioral Health to provide access to additional clinical supports for students and families as necessary.
- (Tier 3) Consultations may be requested with a behaviorist to develop and implement an intervention plan to support individual students.

The District will provide the following resources for staff:

- Staff will have access to social, emotional & mental health support through district staff, and our partnership with an outside agency, to support arising needs.
- Staff will receive professional development in the identification and remediation of mental health concerns.
- Staff will be provided with information to access free and confidential mental health support helplines.



The Mountainside School District looks forward to returning to full day, in-person instruction. We are proud to have successfully navigated this pandemic, and we are confident with our amazing community's continued support and partnership, that we will have an even more productive 2021-2022 school year!

The "Road Forward" may have some unexpected turns, but together, with a focus on the health and safety of our staff and students, the Mountainside School District will continue to deliver meaningful educational experiences for all. Be well.

-Janet Walling
Superintendent of Schools