

For Immediate Release

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District Announces New Student-Support Categories Ahead of Return to In-Person Hybrid Instruction April 6

New CDC Guidelines Confirm PPS Readiness for In-Person Instruction

PITTSBURGH February 22, 2021 –The pressure to reopen schools is at an all-time high across the United States and here in Pittsburgh as many students struggle to learn remotely, and parents juggle eLearning while working to meet the needs of their families. Today PPS announced new support categories, based on students' needs and a new survey to capture parent comfort levels and desire for in-person hybrid learning. The survey will launch this week through schools first with families of students with the highest need and identified for return April 6.

"With a semester's worth of data, we are now able to equitably identify our students who are struggling the most to make progress in eLearning," said Superintendent Anthony Hamlet. While we long for the day when we can reopen our school buildings for all students, to ensure safe and healthy school communities we must prioritize those students with the highest need for the return to in-person instruction in a hybrid model."

New Student-Support Categories

Per the Board's resolution, Pittsburgh Public Schools students will now be placed in new student-support categories based on multiple data points, including attendance, performance data in math and English Language Arts and other factors including Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Strengths, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 plan or English language services. The criteria was established by the District to equitably identify students who are struggling most. Support categories are defined as follows:

Support Category 1: Student demonstrating positive progress in eLearning.

Support Category 2: Student demonstrating progress in eLearning.

Support Category 3: Student demonstrating some progress in eLearning.

Support Category 4: Student is not demonstrating progress and/or is in Kindergarten or PreK

Approximately 4,786 students K-12 identified as Support Category 4 will be prioritized for in-person learning when schools reopen Tuesday, April 6. An additional 5,215 students in Support Category 3 will follow Monday, April 26. All PreK and kindergarten students are prioritized for return to in-person instruction first. The District has not identified a return to in-person instruction day for students in Support Category 2 (7,136) and Support Category 1 (3,085). Plans for Support Categories 1 and 2 will be evaluated

based on social distancing guidelines and the number of families who decide to remain in remote instruction. All families will be notified of their student's support category early March.

Students in Support Categories 4 and 3 will return to school on an AA/BB schedule. Students on the AA schedule will attend school on Monday and Tuesday (AA). Students on the BB schedule will attend school on Thursday and Friday. Students at Pittsburgh Pioneer and Pittsburgh Conroy will attend four days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). Schools will work with families to identify which days of the week their child will return for in-person hybrid learning. School buildings will be closed each Wednesday for further cleaning and disinfecting of facilities.

New CDC Guidelines Confirm PPS Readiness for In-Person Instruction

Today's announcement follows new [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidelines](#), shared February 12, to provide a pathway for the reopening of school. The updated guidelines conveyed five (5) Mitigation Strategies to reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in schools. Based on the guidance, touted as the clearest to date, Pittsburgh Public Schools has in place the layered mitigation strategies deemed essential elements for safe K-12 in-person instruction, including:

- Universal and correct use of masks
- Physical distancing
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities
- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department

"Our District meets and exceeds the mitigation strategies that were released by the CDC", said, Superintendent Anthony Hamlet, Ed.D. "We are ready to welcome our students back in a hybrid approach, when schools are scheduled to open April 6."

At this week's Legislative Meeting, the Board is expected to approve the purchase of 220 Medify HEPA Air Purifiers, along with 220 replacement filters for placement throughout the District. The use of portable HEPA fan/filtration is among interventions recommended for consideration by the CDC to improve ventilation. Currently, all city schools have ventilation systems designed to bring in outdoor air that comply with applicable local codes and ordinances. As renovations are performed, HVAC systems are replaced to meet current codes, standards and best practices. To support ventilation, supply and exhaust air supply systems are flushed for a minimum of two hours before and after building occupancy. The District will seek reimbursement of \$65,517 for the air purifiers from the School Health and Safety Grant from the CARES Act.

Vaccinations for Teachers and Staff

The new CDC guidelines also provide direction regarding Vaccinations for Teachers and Staff, and in communities as soon as supply allows. “Our Administration understands the resistance from our teachers and their union, and we agree that our teachers should be prioritized to receive COVID-19 vaccines. As a District, we are doing everything we can to work with our healthcare partners like UPMC to schedule vaccinations as quickly as possible as part of 1B distribution,” said Dr. Hamlet. He continues, “However, it is unrealistic to continue to postpone the reopening of our schools until every teacher is vaccinated.”

Vaccinating teachers and school staff can be considered one layer of mitigation and protection for staff and students. The CDC guidance goes on to share that access to vaccination should not be considered a condition for reopening schools for in-person instruction. Even after teachers and staff are vaccinated, the District will need to maintain its mitigation efforts, which include requiring masks in schools and physical distancing.

“Since March 2020, we have logged thousands upon thousands of unbudgeted hours to plan and prepare the District’s classrooms, buildings and structures to support the return to in-person learning,” said Interim Chief of Operations Mike McNamara. “We have made it our mission to protect our staff and students and meet the criteria from the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health.”

Health and Safety Plan

On October 28, the Board approved changes to the District’s All-In [Health and Safety Plan](#). While no strategies exist for completely eliminating the spread of COVID-19, the state required Health and Safety plan outlines strategies for keeping transmission as low as possible in District schools and facilities.

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Layered Mitigation Strategies to Support Safe Reopening of Schools

Please find below a summary of just some of the layered mitigation strategies outlined in the District’s Health and Safety Plan available at www.pghschools.org/healthandsafetyplan.

Communication of COVID-19 in Our Schools

The District’s [COVID-19 Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth, and Child Care Programs](#) informs the steps taken by its Crisis Team when individuals are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19. When a positive case of COVID-19 occurs at a school or facility, a general notification is shared with the school community or building staff via a robo call and/or electronic communications. Staff and families of students identified as close contacts to the positive case are personally notified. Informed by the

Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines, the District considers the level of exposure, the number of positive cases in a school within a 14-day period, and the level of community spread in its decision-making related to school closures. When it is determined that a school, site or program must close, the District notifies local media, in addition to communicating the closure with families and staff. The school and/or areas impacted are sanitized. This information is available on the District's website at www.pghschools.org/COVID19.

A new COVID-19 Dashboard summarizes exposures and positive cases among students and staff. The Dashboard shares cumulative exposures and positive cases by school or facility. Sites where there have been no exposures or positive cases are not listed. The Dashboard is updated each Monday at www.pghschools.org/coviddashboard.

Availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

According to the CDC, masks worn securely over the nose and mouth are an essential element to preventing people from getting and spreading COVID-19. In Pittsburgh Public Schools, all students, staff and visitors age two and older are required to wear a mask while in school, on District property and while riding the school bus.

The District's signage plan found throughout facilities reinforces compliance with expectations for the proper use of masks, handwashing and social distancing. In addition, reusable masks have been secured for staff and students at every school, and disposable masks are available for both staff and students who forget their masks. Specialized masks to support the visual observation of the mouth are available for designated employees, and school nurses have been equipped with mask/face shields, gloves and gowns to ensure these frontline healthcare workers have what they need to support the health and wellness of school communities. And for staff who work with some of the most vulnerable students, where medical issues make wearing a mask dangerous or unreasonable, the District will provide the PPE necessary to support students' safely.

Cleaning and Cleanliness

Keeping students and staff safe as schools reopen requires enhanced cleaning and maintenance and adjustments for how students and staff enter, exit, and use schools. Every school building will be cleaned and disinfected daily, paying particular attention to high-touch surfaces. Facilities will be thoroughly disinfected every Wednesday. PPS uses EPA and CDC approved disinfectant supplies, including electrostatic sprayers, disinfectant solutions, and Tyvek suits.

Student and Adult Safety Compliance

The [Student and Employee Covid-19 Self Screening Tool](#), based on CDC guidelines, is available for use by students and staff daily. Families should use the tool for each child in their household before students

board the bus or arrive at school. Employees should use the screener before coming to their work location. Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in close contact should stay home.

Adherence to Social Distancing in Transitions and Room Assignments

Everyone will be required to maintain 6-feet of distance from others whenever possible. Student movement will be limited as much as is practical. Schools and classrooms will operate with strictly limited occupancies. Classrooms, auditoriums, cafeterias, and other school spaces have been set up to ensure that students, teachers, and staff maintain 6 feet of distance.

To help maintain social distancing and reduce congestion:

- Schools have established hallway traffic patterns
- Stairways have been designated for going up and down, when possible

Isolation Area

The Board approved Health and Safety Plan outlines clear parameters for a safe and effective isolation area in each school. Any student showing symptoms in school will immediately be isolated until a parent or guardian can pick them up. A desk/table will be available for each occupant of the isolation area to ensure social distancing. An adult will remain with the student at an appropriate distance, equipped with a face covering, gown and gloves. Unless they can supply a note from a doctor stating that it is safe for them to return to school, symptomatic students are required to wait 14 days before returning.