

2021-22



**Reopen.
Recover.
Reimagine.**

GCS School Re-Entry FAQs

August, 2021

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Guilford County Schools Protocols



Q. How will GCS protect the health of students, staff and visitors this school year?

A. GCS will continue to follow the health [protocols](#) recommended for public schools by North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). GCS also will continue as a district member in the [ABC Science Collaborative](#). GCS also regularly seeks guidance from other national experts and remains in frequent communication with school officials from similarly situated school districts across North Carolina and nationally.

In addition, in alignment with the guidance issued for schools by the U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Infection Control (CDC), GCS will continue using multiple prevention strategies that act as different layers of protection for students, staff and visitors. The layers are designed to work together so that if one prevention strategy is not available, another layer is there to back it up and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

While vaccination represents the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and significantly reduces serious illness, hospitalization and death, according to public health officials, research indicates that using multiple strategies or layers of protection also helps reduce in-school transmission of COVID-19. This approach is strongly recommended for use in schools by the [CDC](#) and the [NCDHHS](#).

Q. How are protocols different from last year?

A. As public health officials have learned more about what causes COVID-19 and have identified what prevention strategies work best, their recommendations and our protocols change accordingly. Here's a quick overview of what's new and what's staying the same thus far for the 2021-2022 school year. Please note that as public health guidance changes, we will change our protocols accordingly.

What's new – changes in health protocols

- In-person learning has been expanded to include all students and physical distancing has moved from required to recommended.
- Staff meetings may now be held in person; however, staff should continue to limit prolonged exposure (lengthy meetings in one room) and use outdoor spaces and well-ventilated spaces as much as possible. Staff may also continue meeting virtually.
- Physical distance = 3 feet for students, 6 feet for unvaccinated adults, 6 feet between students and staff, all to greatest extent possible.
- As student enrollment and physical spaces vary greatly by school, principals will determine how meals will be handled at their schools, including the use of cafeterias.
 - Since students can only unmask when outdoors or when eating and drinking, and since NCDHHS and the CDC recommend maintaining 6 feet of physical distance between students when eating, staff will need to stagger lunch times within classrooms, outdoor spaces and cafeterias.

- All bathroom stalls/sinks reopen; however, sinks should not be used for filling water bottles.
- Students may continue using water bottles and should use the bottle filling stations provided in each school to refill them.
- COVID screening tests will be required for unvaccinated students and staff participating in high-risk voluntary activities such as athletics and marching band.
- Cleaning and disinfecting requirements have been simplified (from 3 levels to 1) in alignment with NCDHHS and CDC guidelines.
- Temperature checks and other pre-entry screenings are no longer required for staff, including through the CrisisGo app. Student pre-entry screenings were discontinued last spring in alignment with NCDHHS guidelines.
- There are no capacity limits/physical distancing requirements on school buses. Elementary students may ride three students per bench seat while secondary school students may ride two students per bench seat.

What's staying the same as last school year – health protocols

- As approved by the Board of Education on July 27, 2021, face coverings/masks are required for building entry and must be worn at all times while indoors at all GCS schools and facilities. (Face coverings are not required outdoors, unless otherwise specified.)
- GCS will continue monthly deliveries of PPE and cleaning supplies to schools.
- Isolation Rooms and protocols will continue.
- Community use of facilities is only allowed outdoors. Use of indoor facilities is not allowed.
- GCS campuses remain closed to volunteers/visitors to campus.
- Field trips are not allowed.
- Water fountains remain closed.

Q. What specific protocols are in place for 2021-2022?

A. GCS health protocols 2021-2022 are outlined briefly below; all protocols are subject to change as public health recommendations shift based on new information and research.

Masking Guidance

Universal masking for all students and staff indoors and on buses

All classrooms, school buses, schools and offices have access to child-sized and adult-sized disposable masks that have three or four layers. Staff and students may ask for these as needed and are encouraged to wear district-provided masks.

All students, staff and visitors who enter GCS buildings are required to wear face coverings/masks indoors (except when eating or drinking) and on school buses. Face coverings/masks must be worn regardless of vaccination status or ability to physically distance.



Masks are not required outdoors. However, certain high-risk activities may require physical distancing or other prevention strategies. For example, the district has specific protocols for visual and performing arts (VPA), including choral performances and marching bands. These protocols are posted on the district's reopening schools [website](#). The district also has special protocols in place for students with disabilities who are served in self-contained classes, public separate schools and/or who need personal care assistance.

Face Covering Accommodations, with limited exemptions, are granted to students with disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Parents/guardians may contact their school principal for information regarding the process used to make this determination and required documentation.

The school board plans to review masking requirements each nine-week grading period. If Guilford County community spread and in-school transmission rates drop for 14-days or more, the board may choose to revisit this policy prior to the next grading period.

Q. Why does GCS require universal masking indoors?

- A.** The Guilford County Board of Education voted July 27, 2021, to require all GCS students, staff and visitors to wear face coverings or masks indoors.

The school board based their decision on the recommendation of local public health officials, who shared data regarding the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant in Guilford County and North Carolina, the low vaccination rates of teens and adults in our county and the current ineligibility of students under age 12 to receive vaccinations against COVID-19.

Public health officials also cited extensive research conducted in North Carolina and nationally which indicated that masking played a significant role in keeping in-school transmission rates of COVID-19 low (less than 1%) last school year, even in areas with high levels of community spread.

With consistent masking in place, there was not a significant difference regarding in-school transmission rates in schools/on school buses in North Carolina schools, despite wide variance (0 to 3 feet or more) in physical distancing protocols across districts, per the [ABC Science Collaborative](#).

In addition, *NCDHHS* and the *CDC* recommend universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status. The *NCDHHS* and the *CDC* also strongly recommend the return to full-time, in-person learning as long as the proper prevention strategies are in place to limit in-school transmission of COVID-19.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) also recommended that K-12 schools require universal face masking at schools for individuals older than 2 years of age. Moreover, the AAP stated that at this point in the pandemic, the benefits of in-person school learning outweigh the risks in almost all cases and strongly recommended that schools reopen for all students.

Q. What kind of face covering or mask is acceptable?

- A.** Face coverings/face masks help limit the spread of COVID-19 and are mandatory indoors at GCS schools. GCS will provide three- and four-layer disposable face coverings/masks in the appropriate size for students and staff. Supplies are sent monthly to schools; staff should check with their principals or supervisors if they need additional masks for themselves or for their students. Principals may also order additional masks as needed.

If parents/guardians/students/employees choose to use personal face coverings/masks instead, please adhere to the following CDC recommendations. Face coverings should:

- Be made of washable and breathable fabric that is tightly woven. Lace, bandanas, old T-shirts and stretchy knits do not provide sufficient protection.
- Have at least **two layers** of material.
- Fit snugly to the child's face and cover the nose and mouth.
- Should be cleaned every day if non-disposable and replaced each day if disposable.
- Handled by the ear loops or ties only.
- Comply with all GCS policies and the Student Code of Conduct, as well as school dress codes. Non-compliance may result in student/personnel disciplinary action.
- If a student or staff member does not have a face covering, the school principal/teacher or supervisor will provide one. Supplies are available at every school and in every facility; principals/supervisors can order additional supplies from the district.

Q. My child's mask is really dirty at the end of each day. What should I do?

- A.** Encourage your child to ask for a clean, disposable mask when his/her personal masks become soiled. There is no reason your child needs to wear a dirty mask at school, and parents do not have to provide masks. Schools and school buses should be fully stocked with child-sized, three- to four-layer disposable face coverings/masks.

Personal face-coverings/masks should be washed every night. If desired, children may also wear the school-provided face covering under their personal mask, but double masking is not required nor necessary from a public health standpoint. Masks with layers (three- to four-layers are preferred) are better at preventing the transmission of COVID-19 than single or double-layer-masks.

Q. The face covering/mask keeps falling down. What should I do?

- A.** If the face mask keeps falling under the child's nose or chin, it's either too loose or too large for the person wearing it. If it's too loose, try tightening the ear loops or ties. If it's too large, the teacher can provide a child-sized face-covering/mask. Teachers/bus drivers should ask their principals/supervisors for additional mask supplies when needed.

Q. Are there any students who should not wear a face covering or mask?

- A.** Most students can wear a face covering or face mask without issue. Face coverings/masks should NOT be worn by pre-kindergarten children while napping, or by children younger than two years old.

Students with disabilities or those with documented medical concerns who have trouble breathing/low oxygenation levels or who cannot remove the face covering/mask without assistance may qualify for an accommodation. The determination is made on an individual, case-by-case basis. There are no blanket exceptions or waivers. For more information, please contact your child's school and ask to speak with the Section 504/EC contact for more details.

Teachers and other adults working by themselves in a classroom or office do not have to wear masks. However, they should put a mask on if another person enters their room.

Q. Are there medical/disability-related exemptions in place for students or staff regarding masking?

- A.** Due to the significant health and safety risks associated with COVID-19, masks are required to be worn by all students while indoors at this time. There are no exemptions to this rule. However, GCS does provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities based on the individual needs of the child. If a child has a disability impacting their ability to wear a mask and the parent would like to request an accommodation, we can provide the parent with information about that process. Please contact your child's school and ask to speak with the Section 504/EC contact for more details.

Q. Is there a religious exemption from masking?

- A.** No. Religious exemptions or accommodations are not available for masking. There are religious exemptions for vaccinations. Legally, religious accommodations are not required to be offered when a rule is uniformly applied and is designed to protect general safety (as is the case here). Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities must be considered even in cases where religious exemptions are not available.

Q. How do I request an accommodation for my child?

- A.** You can request a face covering medical documentation form from your child's school. The form must be completed by a physician and supplemented with medical records. Your child's 504/IEP team will schedule a 504/IEP meeting to review the documentation. The team evaluates the information and determines eligibility. If the student meets the eligibility criteria and the face covering accommodation is warranted, the team develops an accommodation plan. The 504 Team or IEP Team will convene and document the precautions and additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed for the school and transportation settings.

Q. Can students or staff wear valve masks?

A. No. Valve masks let air particles in, thus defeating the purpose of wearing a face-covering/mask.

Q. What about N95 respirators?

A. N95 respirators are designed for use by trained medical professionals in healthcare settings. Public health officials at the local, state and federal levels do not recommend using N95 respirators in schools. KN95 face masks are a suitable alternative and are available for EC staff upon request.

Q. What about teachers and staff who must be in close contact with a student, or with a student who cannot wear a face-covering/mask due to a disability or medical exemption?

A. GCS is providing additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for these teachers and staff members, including face shields, masks, gowns and gloves. Teachers and staff who have close contact with students who cannot wear a face covering/mask due to a medical or behavioral condition or disability may choose to wear a face shield as well as a face mask. However, staff should not wear face shields without face masks as face masks provide the greatest protection against COVID-19.

Q. When can face coverings/masks be removed? Can students take breaks?

A. No. Students and staff cannot take mask breaks. Public health officials advise students and staff to wear face coverings/masks at all times when indoors. Face coverings/masks may be removed only when students or staff are eating or drinking or when they are outdoors.

- Employees who are working by themselves in a classroom or office do not have to wear a face-covering/mask. However, they should keep one with them so they can quickly put one on if someone enters the room.
- Face coverings/masks must be worn indoors in the presence of other students or staff, or when accessing other areas of the building, including hallways, restrooms, work rooms and other shared spaces.

Q. Are face coverings required when outdoors?

A. On April 28, *Executive Order 209* eliminated the outdoor masking requirement for individuals. The *Strong Schools NC Public Schools Toolkit* was updated accordingly on July 29 and again on August 18, 2021.

However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission as in Guilford County, local public health officials, NCDHHS and the CDC recommend that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

We recognize that some staff and students will prefer to continue wearing their face covering/masks while outdoors, and we support them in their decision to do so.

Q. Will teachers show my child how to wear a face-covering/mask?

- A.** Yes. Teachers will show students how to wear and care for their face coverings/masks. GCS also has prepared a video that shows students and staff how to properly wear face coverings/masks.

Tutorials may be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeWK-i1Sw-XneW1Nx12Ml7iTkf8k2x1lm>

Q. If students or staff wear a face shield, do they need to wear a cloth face-covering or mask?

- A.** Yes. Face shields offer more limited protection against the respiratory droplets that carry the virus. Face coverings/masks are essential and mandatory with or without a face shield.

If students with disabilities who have been approved for mask exemptions are able to wear face shields, they should be encouraged to do so, however.

Q. What happens if my child refuses to wear a face-covering or mask?

- A.** All students are expected to wear masks. If a child refuses to wear a mask, the child will be sent to the school office and parents will be contacted. Students who refuse to wear a mask cannot stay in school. Schools will work with the parent and child to assist the child in the adjustment to wearing a mask; however, if a child will not wear a mask, the child may not stay at school. Ultimately, schools will follow the Student Code of Conduct in determining whether any disciplinary actions are appropriate.

Q. Does masking cause psychological harm in children or adults?

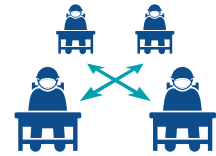
- A.** No. Research indicates that mask wearing has no significant adverse health effects for wearers. Studies of healthy hospital workers, older adults and adults with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) reported no change in oxygen or carbon dioxide levels while wearing a cloth or surgical mask either during rest or physical activity. The safety of mask use during exercise has been confirmed in other [studies](#) of healthy adults.

Additionally, no oxygen desaturation or respiratory distress was observed among children less than 2 years of age when masked during normal play. [Studies](#) have found that wearing face masks have identified no physiologic differences between periods of rest or exercise while [masked or non-masked](#).

Q. Is it true that wearing a 3- or 4-layer mask will reduce my child's oxygenation levels?

- A.** No. Wearing a mask has not been shown in peer-reviewed [studies](#) to cause changes in children's oxygen saturation levels as compared to those who are not wearing masks.

Physical Distancing Guidance



Q. What are the physical distancing protocols?

- A. In classrooms and other indoor school settings, staff should maintain three (3) feet of physical distance between students, where possible. In some situations, physical distancing may not be possible due to space limitations and the potential of limiting student access to in-person instruction/participation in the school's educational program.

In outdoor settings if masks are not worn, staff and students should maintain six (6) feet of distance whenever possible. Staff and students should put their masks or face coverings back on, replace any disposable masks worn outside during physical activity and wash their hands/use hand sanitizer when re-entering their building and/or classroom.

Staff should maintain six (6) feet of physical distance from students when possible. This does not mean that teachers cannot move in more closely to assist students as needed; it does mean they may want to limit one-on-one assistance to just minutes at a time.

Instruction that includes singing, shouting, playing wind instruments, rigorous dance or exercise, should be held outside if possible. If held indoors, ensure consistent mask use and six-feet of physical distancing between students.

Additional PPE and protocols are in place for EC staff who serve students with significant disabilities and/or who provide personal support and care to individual students with disabilities. (Contact your principal or supervisor for additional guidance.)

Adults should stay six (6) feet apart from others (students and adults) to the greatest extent possible. Public health officials also encourage schools to limit prolonged, in-person exposure between adults when possible.

Locker rooms/Gymnasiums/Cafeteriums

Student use of locker rooms and lockers for PE and athletics is allowed. Schools should avoid having all classes use the locker rooms at the same time, if possible. The teacher/designee should monitor students to make sure that all students are wearing masks consistently. School personnel also should minimize the time students spend changing clothes (ideally, less than 15 minutes) and will help ensure consistent use of masking inside the locker rooms.

In gymnasiums, "cafeteriums" and auditoriums, staff should maintain three (3) feet of physical distance between students. School personnel should monitor students to ensure masks are worn appropriately and consistently.

Visual Cues

Floor markings and posters in hallways and other common areas will remind staff and students to maintain the appropriate physical distance and to avoid congregating in large groups. Classroom posters will encourage and reinforce the importance of mask wearing (and how to wear a mask properly), handwashing/hand sanitizing and respiratory etiquette.

Meals

Principals/school administration will determine whether students are eating in the cafeteria, inside classrooms and/or other areas during lunch time. The use of outdoor spaces, with appropriate physical distancing, is encouraged. Principals will implement a rotation schedule if cafeterias are used.

During meals, staff and students should maintain six (6) feet of physical distance to the maximum extent possible. Masks should be worn (indoors) during breakfast/lunch, except when eating and drinking. During meals when six feet of distance or physical barriers between students are not possible, teachers/school personnel will stagger when students – particularly elementary and middle school students who have not yet had the opportunity to get vaccinated – are unmasked to eat/drink so everyone is not unmasked at the same time.

Staff meetings

Staff meetings may be held in person or virtually, as appropriate. Staff should maintain six (6) feet of distance between adults to the greatest extent possible. School personnel should continue to limit prolonged, in-person, indoor exposure to other adults in the same room as much as possible.

Per NCDHHS, schools should:

“Minimize opportunities for close contact resulting from sustained exposure (15 minutes or more, cumulative over a 24-hour period, within 6 feet distance) between teachers and staff during staff meetings, planning periods, lunch, recess, in teacher lounges, and break rooms and other areas teachers and staff may congregate.”

Transportation Guidance



Q. What are the GCS protocols for bus riders?

A. All students and staff are required to wear a face covering/masks on buses, vans and other forms of group transportation provided by the district. Parents/guardians may not board GCS school buses. (As a reminder, GCS provides three- and four-layer masks for students and staff who need them.)

The transportation department will ensure that bus drivers have adequate supplies on school buses, including disinfecting wipes and other cleaning supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as masks.

Physical distance and capacity limits on school buses have been removed and are no longer required by NCDHHS or the CDC. GCS will return to its pre-pandemic school bus seating of three students per bench seat at the elementary school level and two students per bench seat at the middle and high school levels.

Student Guidance



Q. Have the health protocols for students entering the building changed since last year?

A. Yes. Student health attestations are no longer required or advised by NCDHHS and the CDC.

The *StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit* states: "NCDHHS does not recommend daily COVID-19 symptom screening for all students at school entry; Schools should follow their typical procedures for exclusion as they would for any type of illness if a child is symptomatic at school."

Parents/guardians are encouraged to monitor their children's symptoms and keep them home if they have a fever or are ill. NCDHHS recommends "that families refer children to diagnostic testing who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19."

Students should remain home until they are symptom- and fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medicine.

Q. Will students who travel (not with the school system) internationally and/or out of state quarantine prior to coming to school?

A. Possibly, depending on the location of travel. Please [click here for CDC travel advisories](#), and here for [advisories pertaining to COVID-19](#).

Q. Will voluntary, after-school activities resume this year?

A. Yes. Unless otherwise indicated or restricted by local, state public health directives, executive orders by the Governor or GCS Board of Education directives, all voluntary, after-school activities are resuming this year. This includes middle and high school sports, clubs and other extracurricular or co-curricular activities.

All extracurricular activities are voluntary, including athletics. Given the higher risk of transmission associated with practices and competitions, student athletes are required to either submit proof they are vaccinated or evidence of a negative test for COVID-19 prior to participation. (More information regarding the district's testing program for COVID-19 is provided below.)

Special events and performances involving parents and family members are currently not allowed. Given the high levels of community spread in Guilford County and North Carolina, we need to limit any additional exposure to COVID-19 as much as possible. We are hopeful this will change as more people get vaccinated and transmission rates drop.

Q. Is ACES resuming this year? What are the health protocols for ACES?

A. Yes, ACES will resume service this year at schools where parent/guardian interest is sufficient to support the program. ACES will follow all GCS health protocols and will adhere to the recommendations from the NCDHHS and CDC as indicated throughout this document.

Q. Are there any other protocols for students participating in visual and performing arts during the school day, or as part of their extracurricular activities?

A. Yes. In addition to wearing masks indoors, additional protocols have been put in place for students participating in marching band, chorus, theater and other visual and performing arts, both during the school day and/or as part of the extracurricular activities. These include:

- With masking in place, spacing for instruments/choral groups should be six (6) feet if possible.
- When masking isn't possible or outdoors if masks are not worn, maintaining a physical distance of six (6) feet between students and between students and adults, to the maximum extent possible.
- Students and staff should maintain a physical distance of six (6) feet apart from each other indoors and outdoors, to the maximum extent possible.
- Adults should remain six (6) feet apart from each other to the maximum extent possible.
- See also *NCDHHS* and *CDC* guidelines for schools and school-related activities (i.e. equipment, student materials and supplies).
- See also the additional guidelines for visual and performing arts developed in partnership with the ABC Science Collaborative.

Employee Guidance



Q. Will employee temperature checks and health attestations be required?

A. Employee temperature checks and health attestations (via paper or CrisisGo) are no longer required or advised prior to building entry by the NCDHHS or CDC. This change became effective in GCS on August 9, 2021. The *StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit* advises that "all schools should have staff perform self-monitoring of symptoms."

However, employees should stay home if they are sick or have any COVID-19 symptoms. Employees should contact their healthcare providers for additional guidance when feeling ill. Employees should check with human resources for guidance regarding leaves.

Q. Will GCS staff be required to submit information regarding their vaccination status and/or submit proof that they have been vaccinated against COVID-19?

A. Yes, while vaccination against COVID-19 is not currently required for employment, all GCS staff are required to submit information regarding their vaccination status and share proof if they indicate they are fully vaccinated.

Q. I am a GCS employee and I am waiting for a COVID-19 test result, what should I do?

A. If you are experiencing symptoms or are not fully vaccinated, notify your supervisor and stay home until you receive notice that the test is negative. If you receive notice that it is positive, contact your supervisor and your healthcare provider for guidance. You will also be contacted by public health. If you are 14 days past your final vaccination, provide the information you received from public health or Cone Health to your supervisor or to Human Resources. Employees who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do not need to quarantine following possible exposure to COVID-19. Public health recommends testing five (5) days following exposure for vaccinated individuals. Testing too early can skew your results.

Q. I am an employee and someone in my household has tested positive for COVID-19. Should I come to work?

A. It depends on whether you are fully vaccinated or are experiencing symptoms. If you are fully vaccinated and do not have any symptoms, come to work. If you are not vaccinated or have symptoms or feel ill, stay home. Notify your supervisor and stay home until you are cleared to return to work by your healthcare professional or public health.

The Guilford County Public Health Department has adjusted its quarantine guidance to match that of the CDC, which states that for those with no symptoms, quarantine may end after Day 10 without testing or after Day 7 when receiving a negative test result (3-5 days following an exposure). If you are 14 days past your final vaccination, provide the information you received from public health or Cone Health to your supervisor or to Human Resources.

Q. I am a GCS employee. Will I have to use my sick leave if I become ill with COVID-19? What if I am quarantined but not ill with COVID-19?

A. The state school board's contagious disease policy will cover employees who are required to isolate/quarantine at the direction of public health officials due to confirmed or presumed COVID-19 exposure. Employees should use sick leave if they become ill with COVID-19 beyond the dates listed from public health officials.

Q. I'm an employee. How do I request an accommodation?

A. Contact Benefits in Human Resources for additional information about the process and any documentation that is required.

Health and Hygiene Guidance



Q. Will water fountains be available for use?

A. Water fountains remain unavailable for use. Students can continue to bring water bottles to school and use the water bottle filling stations provided by the district as needed.

Q. Will bathroom sinks and stalls be used?

A. All bathroom sinks and stalls will be available for use.

Q. What is the hand-hygiene protocol at GCS?

A. All students/staff should wash and sanitize hands frequently. Other guidelines include:

- Using soap and water to wash hands for 20 seconds throughout the day.
- Using bottles of hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) in classrooms or when sinks are not available in the classroom.

Q. What is the respiratory etiquette protocol at GCS?

A. Respiratory etiquette includes:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with tissues or using elbows if tissues are not available.
- Asking for and wearing a clean mask (schools and classrooms have plenty) if you cough or sneeze into your mask. For more details, [click here](#).

Cleaning Guidance



Q. What are the cleaning and disinfecting protocols at GCS?

A. In alignment with [CDC](#) guidelines, GCS uses EPA-approved products to clean and disinfect schools and school buses daily.

Cleaning refers to the use of soap and water while disinfecting refers to using a fluid or chemical that further removes viral particles – including COVID-19 – from surfaces.

Per the CDC,

“In general, cleaning once a day is usually enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. Disinfecting (using disinfectants on the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency COVID-19 list](#)) removes any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection.”

For more information on cleaning a facility regularly, when to clean more frequently or disinfect, cleaning a facility when someone is sick, safe storage of cleaning and disinfecting products, and considerations for protecting workers who clean facilities, see *Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility*.

If a facility has had a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean AND disinfect the space.”

In addition, GCS will clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces two times per day. Cafeteria tables will be wiped down and disinfected in between use and/or in between school use/ACES use and following ACES.

School buses will be cleaned and disinfected prior to and after completing routes each day.

GCS continues to follow local, state and federal health and sanitation requirements for school nutrition programs. Other routine cleaning will be conducted daily; however, manipulatives and student/classroom/media center materials do not need to be cleaned in between uses.

After a COVID positive case has been confirmed by Public Health, maintenance staff and/or the principal will contact the lead custodian to clean and disinfect any affected spaces in alignment with CDC protocols using EPA-approved cleaning fluids and disinfectant.

GCS custodians will clean and disinfect affected areas within 24 hours of identification of a positive COVID-19 case. If an individual has been present at school/work site and prior to student/worker use/arrival or if individual has not been present for more than 24 hours, additional cleaning and disinfecting is not recommended or required, per the CDC; and in these situations, routine cleaning will be sufficient.

Parent/Community Engagement Guidance

Q. Are field trips allowed?

A. Field trips are currently not allowed due to the high transmission level in the community. Athletics and extracurricular activities/competitions are not considered field trips except when involving overnight travel. This includes local, state, national or international travel.

Q. Are parents allowed in buildings?

A. Open houses were held in person and parents were allowed to come into the buildings. However, parents were required to mask and physically distance while on campus and in district buildings. To limit the number of people attending at one time, principals expanded and staggered the times for parents/guardians/families to attend. Hand sanitizer stations were available at building entrances and in classrooms. School-specific guidelines were shared in advance by school principals. A determination regarding whether to hold other parent events indoors later in the school year will be decided on as more information becomes available. Given the high levels of community spread in Guilford County and North Carolina, we need to limit any additional exposure to COVID-19 as much as possible.

Q. Are visitors and volunteers allowed?

A. Visitors and volunteers are not currently allowed in GCS schools and buildings. Parents are allowed in GCS schools for scheduled open houses and IEP meetings only. Given the high levels of community spread in Guilford County and North Carolina, we need to limit any additional exposure to COVID-19 as much as possible.

Q. Is Community Access of Facilities allowed?

A. Outdoor community access of facilities and grounds has been allowed since last spring and remains available. However, indoor community access of school facilities is currently on hold due to the increased positivity rate and high levels of community spread of COVID-19 in the community. Given the high levels of community spread in Guilford County and North Carolina, we need to limit any additional exposure to COVID-19 as much as possible.

COVID-19 Guidance



Q. My child doesn't feel well. I think it's just a cold or allergies. Can he or she come to school?

A. No. COVID-19 mimics common cold and flu symptoms. To keep everyone safe, please keep your child at home. Please contact your healthcare provider or public health and keep your child at home until he or she is cleared by a negative COVID-19 test or is symptom- and fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medicine.

Q. Are COVID-19 and the flu comparable illnesses?

A. No. While both are respiratory illnesses, COVID-19 spreads faster than the flu. A major worry right now is that the Delta variant is a highly contagious SARS-CoV-2 virus strain. First identified in India in December 2020, it swept rapidly through India and Great Britain before reaching the U.S.

The CDC described Delta as more transmissible than the common cold and influenza, as well as the viruses that cause smallpox, MERS, SARS and Ebola. The highest spread of cases and severe outcomes is happening in places with low vaccination rates, and virtually all recent hospitalizations and deaths have been among the unvaccinated, according to CDC.

This is also true in North Carolina. NCDHHS recently identified the Delta variant as the causal variant of COVID-19 in more than 80% of new cases in North Carolina.

On July 27, 2021, CDC released data that showed vaccinated people also can transmit the Delta variant, which prompted CDC officials to recommend indoor masking for vaccinated as well as unvaccinated individuals.

The CDC has labeled Delta a variant of concern, as one person could transmit or infect six other people in an environment with no masking. However, as more people become fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 should slow down.

Compared to the flu, COVID-19 can cause more serious illnesses in some people. COVID-19 can also take longer before people show symptoms and people can be contagious for longer.

People can be infected with both flu and the virus that causes COVID-19 at the same time and have symptoms of both influenza and COVID-19. Testing is needed to tell what the illness is and to confirm a diagnosis.

Q. I am a parent/guardian and I have tested positive for COVID-19, or someone in my household has tested positive, and my child lives with me. Can my child come to school?

A. No. Your child should remain at home. Please inform your principal and contact your healthcare provider or public health for additional guidance.

Q. What happens if a student/staff member becomes ill at school?

A. GCS has a clear and thorough [protocol](#) with defined steps that all schools and district offices must follow when a student or staff member becomes ill at school, has been exposed to COVID-19 or has symptoms. The protocol is aligned with guidance from the NCDHHS and CDC.

If a student has a fever or is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms during the school day, the student will be sent to the isolation room. From there, the principal will contact the student's family and release the student to the parent/guardian. If appropriate, the principal will also provide an isolation letter from public health.

Staff members who are ill, have a fever or exhibiting symptoms are sent home or isolated until their transportation home arrives.

Q. Are contact tracing and case investigations continuing in GCS?

A. Yes. Contact tracing and case investigations involving GCS students and staff who may have COVID-19 or who may have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 are conducted by the Guilford County Public Health Department, typically by school nurses. GCS administrators assist in this process by immediately reporting any suspected cases of COVID-19 among students or staff to public health officials, helping to identify potential contacts and sharing other pertinent information. School staff also participate in this process. District staff meet weekly with local public health officials to share data and address any concerns.

Q. When can students or staff return to school or work?

A. Students and staff may return to school if testing was negative and an alternate diagnosis provided by a healthcare provider explains the symptoms. Students and staff can return to school when they have been symptom and fever free for at least 24 hours without using fever reducing medications.

See also the information provided regarding isolation and quarantine for suspected, presumed or confirmed cases of COVID-19. For helpful information on children and COVID-19, visit the NCDHHS [website](#).

Q. What is the *notification process* if there's a COVID-19 case at my child's school?

- A. Principals/supervisors will notify all parents/guardians whose children have been identified by public health officials as a "close contact" of the person with the positive case.
- Principals/supervisors will also notify employees who have been identified by public health officials as a "close contact," generally defined as being within six (6) feet for at least 15 minutes cumulatively over a 24-hour period.
 - Public health/school officials will also contact affected individuals by text or phone to outline next steps the student's family or employee should take.
 - To protect student and staff privacy, families and employees **will not be directly or personally notified** by the school or GCS every time a positive case has been identified.
 - **Parents/guardians and employees will be notified if a positive case personally affects them so they can take the appropriate actions.**
 - **School-by-school information regarding confirmed cases** is posted on the district's reopening website and via the district's *COVID-19 data dashboards* online. Although this information is updated regularly, lag times can occur while waiting for test results or other confirmation of suspected cases.
 - If the impact is widespread or if a cluster (five or more epidemiologically linked cases) is identified by public health officials, parents and staff members at the affected school will be notified by the principal, typically via the district's mass notification system. Clusters are also reported by public health to the state and are posted on the *NCDHHS website*.
 - Contact tracing is a confidential and private public health process. GCS and public health employees cannot and will not release the name or other private information about a student or staff member with individuals who may have come in contact with someone at school with a verified/confirmed case of COVID-19. Read more about the notification process [here](#).

Q. Is GCS sharing information about confirmed/verified cases of COVID-19 among students and staff at all schools and district facilities?

- A. Yes. While contact tracing is a confidential process involving private medical information that is conducted by public health officials, the district publishes coronavirus data dashboards that show staff, student and athletics-related cases. Only cases that affect a GCS school or facility AND have been confirmed by public health are posted. These dashboards are updated daily during the workweek. Click [here](#) to access the dashboards.

Weekly updates are also available in a simpler format by clicking on the links below.

- [Students](#)
- [Student Athletes](#)
- [Employees](#)
- [Clusters](#)

Q. What other steps are being taken to keep students and staff healthy and safe?

- A.** In addition to the protocols outlined above, GCS continues to partner with local public health officials and healthcare providers in offering vaccinations at school sites and in sharing public health information regarding vaccinations, vaccination clinics, COVID-19 and other pandemic-related news and information.

The district also offers information sessions via Guilford Parent Academy. Families can also tune into GCSTV or follow the district's social media channels, which include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

GCS also maintains an ongoing partnership with the ABC Science Collaborative and regularly seeks guidance from other similarly situated school districts and communities across North Carolina and nationally as well as national experts and professional groups and associations.

COVID-19 Testing Guidance



Q. Why is GCS requiring unvaccinated students participating in athletics and high-risk extracurricular activities to be tested for COVID-19?

- A.** GCS adopted its current policy on testing unvaccinated participants in athletics and other extra-curricular activities upon the recommendation of the NCDHHS, which is the state agency responsible for adopting and implementing public health measures and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NCDHHS currently recommends that schools require that unvaccinated participants in athletics and other high-risk extra-curricular activities undergo screening testing. The current NCDHHS recommendation is subject to change as conditions change, and it's possible that the state could recommend that vaccinated individuals receive testing in the future.

Q. How will the testing program work?

- A.** School districts implementing a testing program may choose to use a state-contracted vendor or conduct testing independently.

GCS is using a state-contracted vendor. This means that NCDHHS has vetted the vendor to ensure that it has:

- The capacity to provide safe testing, agreed to maintain confidentiality in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA");
- Obtained all appropriate licenses for the individuals conducting the tests;
- Received all appropriate Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment ("CLIA") certificates required to perform the testing;
- Received a signed physician standing order for the testing; and,
- The ability to comply with all Food and Drug Administration requirements associated with the test it is using.

Q. Who will perform the tests in GCS?

A. The name of the state-contracted vendor that will be conducting the tests for GCS is Concentric by Ginkgo (“Concentric”).

Q. What type of test will be used?

A. Meta Lab - META CovidNOW SARS-Cov-2 test for Swab Pooling. The test is nasal swab at the front of each nostril, which collects a sample from the nasal walls, a total of 10 – 25 swabs are pooled or batched into one collection tube. This testing method is less intrusive than other COVID testing, which requires a swab further up the nostril (the nasopharynx). A reflex test will be used to confirm a positive result from a positive pool. Confirmatory testing will be done using BinaxNOW™ COVID-19 Ag CARD. The test is also a nasal swab at the front of each nostril.

Q. Are pooled test results reported to public health authorities?

A. No. Since pooled tests do not provide results for individuals, the results are not reported to public health authorities. We only share the results of pooled tests with the individuals that you tell us to. Pooled tests that return positive results will require each specimen in the pool to be retested individually to determine which individual(s) are positive.

Q. Where will the tests be performed?

A. The testing will be performed at the school. After collecting the sample, Concentric will conduct the sample analysis and determine a test result.

Q. Will GCS require parental consent before testing students for COVID-19?

A. Yes. Parental consent is required to administer COVID-19 testing for students. The parental consent form will be valid for one year from the date of signature or until testing requirements change. Parents have the right to withdraw their consent for testing at any time, and in doing so, the student will not be permitted to participate in athletics or other voluntary, high-risk, co-curricular activities sponsored by the school and/or GCS.

Q. Who has access to my child’s test results?

A. Concentric will provide information about the test result directly to the parent of the student. The local public health department will also receive the results of all tests, as required by law. Each school site will also have an administrator designated to administer the program. That administrator will receive information that each student who is required to be tested has undergone the testing and will receive information about any positive test results.

Q. What happens if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

A. If the student tests positive for COVID-19, the administrator will share that result exclusively with the individuals who need to know that information in order to conduct contact tracing and isolate

individuals who were exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Otherwise, the test results will be kept entirely confidential.

If a child tests positive for COVID-19, they must isolate for ten (10) days from the date of the positive test, assuming the child does not develop symptoms of COVID-19. If the child tests positive for COVID-19 and develops symptoms, the return date is 10 days after the first date of symptoms so long as the student has been without a fever for 24 hours and other symptoms are improving.

Q. What if I don't want my child to be tested?

A. Testing for COVID-19 is only required for participants in voluntary extra-curricular activities, which include athletics. These activities are not required. Students who do not wish to participate in the testing program and are unvaccinated may nonetheless participate in all other aspects of the educational environment; no student will be excluded from any class based on this policy.

Q. How will GCS address any bullying or harassment that might occur as a result of the testing program?

A. GCS works hard to address concerns of bullying and harassment, and we do not anticipate that any student will experience bullying or harassment based on their confidential medical information.

GCS adopted this policy so that it can offer these extra-curricular activities in a manner that is as safe as it can be for students, staff, and the community. We hope that everyone will work together to keep our community safe from this awful virus and to provide our children with the opportunities afforded by athletics and other activities.

Q. When will GCS begin offering COVID-19 testing?

A. We are working closely with state officials and others to fully develop our plan for testing unvaccinated students and staff who are participating in voluntary programs, including athletics and other extracurricular activities that are considered at higher risk for COVID-19 transmission. When the timeline and other details are finalized, schools will share the information with parents.

Our goal is to keep all students and staff as healthy and safe as possible by limiting in-school transmission of COVID-19.

Quarantine Guidance



Q. What are the isolation and quarantine guidelines for students and staff in GCS schools or facilities?

A. Decisions regarding isolation and quarantines when students or staff who are exposed or potentially exposed) to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school are made by local public health officials in alignment with NCDHHS guidelines.

Per NCDHHS,

“Isolation is required for all presumptive or confirmed cases of COVID-19.”

“Quarantine is required for an individual who has been a close contact (within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes cumulatively over a 24-hour period) of someone who is determined positive with COVID-19 either through testing or symptom consistent diagnosis, with the following three exceptions:

- Individuals who are fully vaccinated and do not have symptoms do NOT need to quarantine after a close contact. Individual should get tested 5 days after exposure and wear a mask around others until receiving a negative test result.
- People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered and do not have symptoms do NOT have to quarantine.
- Students who are not fully vaccinated after a close contact in a classroom or other school setting if masks were being worn appropriately and consistently by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person do NOT need to quarantine.” (Note: This does not apply to adults.)
- This is based on updated CDC guidance and studies that have shown extremely low risk of COVID-19 transmission in classroom settings when face masks were being used appropriately by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person, and when schools had implemented multiple layers of prevention measures to prevent transmission in school settings.
- This applies to student exposures in classrooms, other in-school settings, and school transportation but does not apply to exposures during extracurricular or athletic activities.
- This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. Masking is not considered by public health officials when determining isolation or quarantines for adults.
- An additional potential exception to quarantine (includes) persons who are not fully vaccinated and have tested antibody positive within 3 months before or immediately following a close contact may not need to quarantine IF they have limited or no contact with persons at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness, including older adults and persons with certain medical conditions.
- Since this may be difficult or impossible to assess, NCDHHS generally recommends that individuals who do not meet the three exceptions listed above should still quarantine after a close contact even if they tested antibody positive.
- Exemption from quarantine based on a recent positive antibody test can be considered on a case-by-case if approved by the local public health department.”
- While the CDC continues to recommend quarantine for 14 days after last exposure, local public health official make the final determination for the communities they serve, based on local conditions and needs.
- Guilford County Public Health allows students/staff to return after:
 - – 10 days of quarantine have been completed and no symptoms have been reported during daily at-home monitoring;
 - – 7 days of quarantine have been completed, no symptoms have been reported during daily

at home monitoring, and the individual has received results of a negative antigen or PCR/molecular test on a test taken no earlier than day 5 of quarantine.

- – If quarantine is discontinued before day 14, the individual should continue to monitor symptoms and strictly adhere to all non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g. wear a mask, practice physical distancing) through 14 days after the date of last exposure.”

Q. How will my student receive lessons/schoolwork if s/he is required to quarantine?

A. Students who are isolated/quarantined should still have access to instruction. The impact of the isolation/quarantine will inform the instructional delivery method.

For example, if a small number of students in a class are isolated/quarantined, their assignments should be posted in Canvas with opportunities to check in and receive feedback from their teacher. If a larger number of students is isolated/quarantined, teachers should use SWIVL devices to ensure all students are receiving instruction.

If an entire class or section is isolated/quarantined, teachers (or substitutes) should follow their daily schedule by delivering instruction remotely with built-in opportunities for feedback and breaks.

District curriculum resources have digital licenses and can be embedded into Canvas courses. Ongoing training and integration support for teachers will be provided by the district’s Blended Learning department.

Vaccination Guidance



Q. Where can I get vaccinated against COVID-19?

A. You can go to [NCDHHS](#), enter your zip code and follow the prompts.

[Guilford County](#) is currently offering COVID-19 vaccines at the Greensboro Coliseum located at 1921 W Gate City Blvd, Greensboro, NC 27403. You may schedule an appointment [online](#) or by Phone at (336) 641-7944.

You may print or view a copy of your vaccination card from [NCDHHS](#). The NC COVID-19 Vaccine Portal is a free, fast and secure way for many North Carolinians to present proof of COVID-19 vaccination or print a copy of your COVID-19 vaccine information for other purposes.

Q. Are COVID-19 vaccinations safe?

A. Research indicates that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. Current COVID-19 vaccines protect you against severe illness, hospitalization and death. You may have side effects after vaccination. These are normal and should go away in a few days.

Q. Is the vaccine safe for teenagers?

A. Millions of adolescents and tens of millions of adults in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history.

Adolescents, like adults, may have some temporary reactions, such as a sore arm, feeling tired or achy for a day or two, headache or fever. These are normal and good signs that their body is building protection, and they should go away in a few days.

Parents/caregivers can enroll their adolescent in v-safe, a free, smartphone-based tool that uses text messaging and web surveys to provide personalized health check-ins. Through [v-safe](#), you can report any side effects your teenager may have after vaccination.

There is no safety data indicating that the COVID-19 vaccines impact teens' development or their ability to get pregnant in the future.

Teens can get other vaccines at the same time, or around the same time, as the COVID-19 vaccine.

The NC Pediatric Society, along with the North Carolina Medical Society (NCMS) and the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, strongly encourage all families to ensure adolescents ages 12 and older are vaccinated as soon as possible against COVID-19. Read more from these organizations [here](#).

Q. Are COVID-19 vaccinations FDA-approved?

A. FDA has approved on August 23, 2021, Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for people 16 and over.

FDA has authorized COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use (EUA):

- Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine (authorized for people 12 to 15 year of age)
- Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine (authorized for people 18 and over)
- Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine (authorized for people 18 and over)

Q. Are COVID-19 vaccinations required by the State of North Carolina for school entry and enrollment?

A. No. North Carolina has not mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for eligible students for school entry or as a condition of enrollment.

Q. Are COVID-19 vaccinations required by GCS for all employees?

A. No. However, GCS does require employees to submit information regarding their vaccination status to the district for planning purposes and requires vaccinated employees to submit proof that they are fully vaccinated, if they indicate they have that status.

Q. Will COVID-19 vaccinations give me breast cancer or cause infertility?

A. According to CDC, there is no evidence that female or male fertility problems are a side effect of any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines.

Resources



Q. Where can I go to get credible research and information regarding COVID-19?

- [Guilford County Department of Public Health and Human Services](#)
- [Guilford County COVID-19 data](#)
- [NCDHHS StrongSchools K-12 toolkit](#)
- [NCDHHS ChildCare StrongNC toolkit](#)
- [ABC Science Research Collaborative](#)
- [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction](#)
- [COVID-19 North Carolina dashboard](#)
- [CDC guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- [CDC data tracker](#)
- [CDC contact tracing and case investigation](#)