



# **COVID-19 Response Plan 2021-22**

JULY 2021

# Michigan City Area Schools

## COVID-19 Response Plan 2021-22

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## OVERVIEW

Michigan City Area Schools successfully completed the 2020-21 School Year during the COVID-19 pandemic, following a Reopening Plan that was developed in accordance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the State of Indiana, the Indiana Department of Education, and the LaPorte County Health Department. The Michigan City Area Schools district leadership team consulted with employee groups, parents, community members, and school superintendents locally and nationally to develop this plan. Throughout the school year, the plan was adjusted to meet recommendations and requirements set forth by health officials.

As MCAS prepares for the 2021-22 School Year, the plan has been amended to reflect the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will serve as a guiding document for school operations.

Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MCAS district leadership team reserves the right to make necessary changes in the plan. MCAS will continue to update staff, families, and the community as changes are made.

## A. RESPONSE MODEL

Michigan City Area Schools will base its decisions about operations and mitigation strategies on the level of COVID spread in LaPorte County, as announced by the Indiana Department of Health. When a level change occurs, MCAS will provide timely information to all families and staff. The current level will be posted on the MCAS website.

[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE RESPONSE MODEL PLAN SUMMARY](#)

## B. INSTRUCTION

Michigan City Area Schools will return to full-time, in-person instruction five days a week for all students. All MCAS Schools will reopen and welcome students into buildings on the first day of school (August 18, 2021). MCAS will follow the approved school calendar, which is available on the district website.

MCAS acknowledges that some families may feel that a remote learning option is a better fit for their children. Last Spring, all MCAS families were provided with an opportunity to enroll in the Michigan City Virtual Academy, which will serve students in grades K-12 through asynchronous and/or synchronous instruction during the 2021-22 school year. For more information about the MCVA program, please visit <http://educateMC.net/MCVA> or contact your child's school principal.

All students will be provided with opportunities to receive instruction and complete missed assignments due to illness or quarantine. Take-home materials and/or synchronous online learning will be provided at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

For information about school absence due to illness, please consult the [MCAS school handbook](#) for your child's grade level.

## C. HEALTH AND SAFETY

### General Health Protocols

- MCAS will follow **Indiana State Department of Health** guidance for school building openings.
- MCAS will practice **physical distancing**. This means spacing of 3 feet or greater between individuals, whenever possible.
- **Masks/Face Coverings**
  - MCAS will follow the recommendations/requirements of local, state, and federal health departments regarding face masks. (Currently, per CDC guidance, face masks are required indoors in schools for all individuals, regardless of vaccination status.)
  - Masks are not currently required for recess and other outdoor activities.
  - MCAS will follow federal and state guidelines regarding mask wearing on school buses. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.)
  - MCAS will supply a face covering to any individual who requests one. Cloth face coverings should be laundered each day they are worn.
  - Some students and staff may have medical conditions that limit their ability to wear a face covering. MCAS will work with these individuals to create an accommodation or modification that meets the needs of their disability and the safety of the school environment. Medical documentation of such conditions will be required.
- **Handwashing** will be emphasized multiple times a day for all staff and all students, PreK-12.
- **Hand sanitizer stations** will be available at building entrances and common areas such as cafeterias.
- **Signage** and posters will be displayed throughout each school building to remind students and staff of good hygiene habits and other precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- MCAS encourages all students/parents, staff, and visitors to **assess their health** before leaving home each morning.
- **Temperature checks** may be a component of the COVID-19 screening process for both students and staff.

## Quarantine and Exclusion

- Students/staff will be **excluded from school** if they test positive for COVID-19 or exhibit one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19, based on Indiana State Department of Health guidance, that is otherwise not explained. As of 9/3/20 this guidance includes the following symptoms:
  - Temperature 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, or chills
  - Sore throat
  - New uncontrolled cough or shortness of breath that causes difficulty breathing (for individuals with chronic allergic/ asthmatic cough, a change in their cough from baseline)
  - Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, or abdominal pain
  - New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever
  - New loss of taste or smell
- Staff and students who are ill with **symptoms of COVID-19** should seek medical attention for further evaluation and instructions. This includes individuals who are fully vaccinated. The [Indiana State Department of Health website](#) has a list of testing facilities, their location, and hours of operation. This list is updated frequently. MCAS will not administer COVID-19 tests at school.
- Students and employees who are not vaccinated should remain home if **someone in the household has a confirmed case of COVID-19.**
- When MCAS is made aware of a confirmed positive case involving a student or staff member, a **contact tracing** team will identify and notify all close contacts. (For students, we will notify the parent/guardian.) Per ISDH guidance, if at least 3 feet of separation is provided between students and teachers during the school day, when students are in the classroom AND when masks are always worn, contact tracing will not need to be completed if

there is a positive case identified in the classroom.

- In all other areas of the school environment, a close contact is defined as any unvaccinated individuals within 6 feet of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period.
- A 7, 10, or 14 day quarantine is required for **unvaccinated close contacts**, per ISDH guidelines. No quarantine will be required for **vaccinated individuals and those who had COVID in the last 90 days**, unless symptomatic. Proof of vaccination or previous COVID status must be provided to MCAS prior to return.
- Once a student or employee is excluded from the school environment, they may **return** if they satisfy the recommendations of the ISDH **or are released by a healthcare provider** (medical documentation required).

## D. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

### Cleaning and Sanitation

Cleaning, disinfection, and sanitation will be performed in partnership with MCAS's custodial provider, Sodexo.

- All buildings will be **thoroughly cleaned prior to the start** of the 2021-2022 school year and the return to in-person instruction. All non-essential items should be removed from classrooms and other areas occupied by students to aid in cleaning and sanitization efforts.
- Nightly **disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces** in rooms that were used during the day will take place. High-touch areas include:
  - Doorknobs
  - Light switches
  - Phones
  - Desks
  - Restroom sinks and toilets
  - Media centers
  - Weight rooms
  - Locker rooms, etc.

- In addition to nightly cleaning, COVID-19 will require MCAS and Sodexo staff to conduct **frequent cleanings** throughout the school day.
- **Emergency cleaning** will occur in situations where a known infection is connected to a MCAS facility. Depending on the size or complexity of the area requiring emergency cleaning, a room or facility may need to be closed. Details of the closure will be communicated to all appropriate stakeholders.

## Cafeterias

- Students will be **prohibited from sharing** food.
- Cafeterias will be **cleaned** after student use.
- No food may be brought in for student parties, etc. and **outside food** may not be delivered for students.

## Classrooms

- Student **desks and seats** will face the same direction in the classroom, where possible.
- All classes will have **assigned seating**. This will assist in contact tracing in the event there is a case of COVID-19.
- Dividers will be available to create **physical barriers** in all classrooms.

## Nurse's Offices

- **Nurses offices** will be relocated from main office areas as possible, and/or isolation spaces will be established for students and staff who are sick with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Nurses and any other staff caring for sick students will be required to wear **personal protective equipment (PPE)** including gloves and face coverings.



## Restrooms

- Restrooms will be **cleaned frequently and resupplied** throughout the day. Students will be educated on **procedures** for restroom areas, including physical distancing and handwashing.

## School Buses

- MCAS will follow federal and state guidelines regarding **face coverings/masks** on school buses. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.) This includes extra-curricular activities. Students without masks will be provided with one before boarding a school bus.
- All students will be **assigned seats** on the bus.
- Buses will be **cleaned and sanitized** before and after student use.

## School Offices & Visitors

- Plexiglass **barriers** will be in place in reception areas at all buildings.
- **Visitors** who must enter the school (for example, to pick up a student) must report to the main office. Masks are required for all school visitors regardless of vaccination status.
- **Classroom and extracurricular volunteers** must provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination and wear a face mask at all times in schools.

## Other

- Each building will designate **entry points** for students.
- **Water fountains will remain out of service.** Students are encouraged to bring their own water (water bottles should be clearly labeled with student name). Touchless water filling stations are available for refills.

- **Field trips** may be limited, based on the level of COVID spread in the community.
- **Extracurricular activities** can take place at schools, providing that physical distancing guidelines can be observed. Please visit the [MCHS Athletics Website](#) for guidance and information regarding high school sports.
- Any outside groups using **MCAS facilities** will be required to cover the cost of disinfecting.
- The “**Dress for Success**” program has been suspended for the 2021-22 school year. A [revised dress code](#) will be in place for all students.

## E. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Staff will receive **updates and training** regarding COVID-19.
- SafeSchools **training** videos on COVID-19 protocols and precautions will be mandatory for all new staff to view.

## F. MENTAL HEALTH

MCAS understands the importance of mental health and the role that it plays in the lives of our students, staff, and families. We are supporting the mental health of stakeholders by providing resources, services, and professional development opportunities.

All schools are staffed by at least one school counselor, and all are served by social workers and/or student success coaches. If a student needs any social or emotional assistance, they should reach out to their counselor.

## G. ATTENDANCE

- Attendance data for all staff and students will be **monitored** daily. Indiana law requires school districts to report to the local health department and the Indiana Department of Education when the percentage of student absences is above 20% of the enrolled students at a school. In addition, all positive cases of COVID-19 will be reported to the Indiana State Department of Health and LaPorte County Health Department for school closure guidance and potential contact tracing.
- MCAS attendance personnel will request specific symptom information when **absences are reported** along with COVID-19 diagnoses and/or potential COVID-19 exposure. Information obtained will be shared with nursing staff.
- A MCAS student absent from school due to COVID-19 related symptoms will be recorded as an **"illness/medical quarantine"** absence. If a student is not ill but circumstances require the student to quarantine, the student's attendance will be recorded as a **"quarantine"** absence. An absence due to quarantining will be considered an "excused" absence from school.
- If a student or staff member has COVID-19 or is quarantined because of COVID-19 related symptoms or contact tracing and is being tested, any other MCAS students or staff members within the **household** should also stay home for the duration of the quarantine period, unless they have been vaccinated.
- Any student who is at home due to COVID-19 is to remain current with his/her **school work**.
- **Employees** who experience COVID-19 symptoms at work will immediately be sent home. Unvaccinated employees who have had a known exposure to someone testing positive for COVID-19 should alert their supervisor and refrain from entering MCAS facilities.
- Since vaccines are readily available, staff will be required to **use accumulated benefit days** for any COVID-19 related absences.

## H. COMMUNICATIONS

- MCAS will provide accurate and timely information to all stakeholders about measures being taken to help keep students and staff safe.
- MCAS will maintain a dashboard on its website to report data on the number of COVID-19 cases in the district.
- MCAS will stress with all students and staff the importance of staying home when sick.
- Due to federal privacy measures, it is important to note that the name(s) of any student or staff who test positive for COVID-19 will not be identified in communications.
- MCAS will emphasize the importance of vaccination for all age groups as soon as they are eligible.
- MCAS will publicize guidelines and tailor specific messages for staff and students regarding decreasing the risk of exposure, including the use of face coverings, frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, and physical distancing.
- MCAS will educate families on their important role and responsibilities, including:
  - Students should stay home when sick;
  - Emergency contact information must be up to date;
  - Families should plan for the potential need to pick up students from school;
  - Best practices for quarantine/isolation and home care

## RESOURCES

- Indiana State Department of Health: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov>
- Indiana State Department of Health Decision Tree: Vaccinated/Unvaccinated Guidance  
[https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/21\\_Ddecision%20Trees\\_Vac\\_7.14.pdf](https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/21_Ddecision%20Trees_Vac_7.14.pdf)
- Indiana State Department of Health: Back to School Guidance, Fall 2021  
<https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/updated%20school%20guidance%207.19.21.pdf>
- Indiana State Department of Health Decision Tree: Guidance for Quarantine and Binax Testing in Schools  
[https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/21\\_Ddecision%20Trees\\_7-26.pdf](https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/files/21_Ddecision%20Trees_7-26.pdf)