

Dear HCPS Community,

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have utilized the expertise and guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Harford County Health Department (HCHD) to inform and guide HCPS COVID-19 safety plans. Currently, all of these organizations strongly recommend masking indoors at school, with the American Academy of Pediatrics joining that endorsement. In light of these recommendations, starting August 16<sup>th</sup>, HCPS will require all to wear masks in buildings and school buses.

Our goal is to keep schools open and to keep our students in school. The CDC has issued an exception to quarantine guidance for schools, whereby if COVID-19 protocols are followed (such as 3-foot distancing, cleaning, and ventilation improvements), and students are wearing masks, then quarantine may not be required. This is a huge support in keeping our students in school. When students are not wearing masks or are unable to distance, then they may be sent home to quarantine for 10-14 days (depending on county transmission rates). As we experienced last school year, quarantine can be extremely disruptive to learning and our goal is to reduce quarantine to keep our students in school.

Masking is not the only HCPS strategy to keep our students healthy and in school. HCPS will follow the CDC approach which, “emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies.” This means we do not use just one approach to protect our students and staff from COVID-19, but the combination of multiple approaches, working together. Safety layers will include emphasizing staying home when sick, handwashing, cleaning, continued ventilation improvements, distancing at least 3 feet wherever possible, COVID testing of symptomatic individuals and close contacts, vaccination clinics, special mitigation strategies for high-risk activities, and response to outbreaks.

The community can help keep our students and staff in school by monitoring themselves for signs and symptoms of COVID, wearing their masks over their mouths and noses, getting the COVID-19 vaccine when/if eligible, and strictly following quarantine and isolation guidelines when ill or when identified as a close contact to someone with COVID-19.

A few reminders:

- 1) Stay home with any of these symptoms: Fever or chills; Cough; Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; Fatigue; Muscle or body aches; Headache; New loss of taste or smell; Sore throat; Congestion or runny nose; Nausea or vomiting; Diarrhea. If these symptoms appear, please contact your health care provider and inform the school nurse of your illness.
- 2) Students who are isolated due to symptoms or illness or quarantined due to close contact, must be picked up promptly from the school and cannot ride an HCPS bus.
- 3) The school nurse will inform all who have been identified as ‘close contact’ about potential exposure to COVID-19 and will inform all impacted on current quarantine requirements.
- 4) Vaccines are available at [www.harfordcountyhealth.com](http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com), 410-612-1779, or <https://www.marylandvax.org/>. Vaccinated individuals may not have to quarantine when exposed to COVID-19 unless they have symptoms of the virus.
- 5) All should bring a water bottle to school, as water fountains continue to be closed except for bottle filling.
- 6) All protocols are subject to change based on public health guidance.

Sincerely,



Sean Bulson, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools



Rachel Gauthier  
President, Board of Education of Harford County