Lowndes County Schools
Return to School Plan

The following is based on information within *Georgia’s Path to Recovery for K-12 Schools*. It is not intended to be an exhaustive or detailed list of expectations, but will provide an overview of the anticipated guidance for re-entry to the traditional setting on August 14, 2020.

Lowndes County Schools understands the seriousness of the health risks of COVID 19. Therefore, we have enhanced our safety and health practices to provide an environment that is conducive to learning while also putting mechanisms in place that mitigate the risks of COVID 19. All of our schools, programs, and offices will follow the guidance of this document.

It is understood that each building has different dynamics and situations; therefore, each building may provide additional information about specific needs. However, at all locations, the health and safety of our staff and students will be our primary focus and priority. This information may be subject to change based on additional guidance received from the Department of Education, and the Department of Public Health.
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**ACADEMIC LEARNING OPTIONS**

Lowndes County School System will ensure appropriate and efficient use of available time for preparation, collaboration, instruction, assessment, and remediation. This includes offering families two options for student learning during the 2020-2021 school year:

| Traditional, face-to-face instruction | School buildings are open and implementing more intensive prevention strategies to curb the spread of the COVID virus. Enhanced social distancing will be strongly encouraged for students and teachers. Face-to-face instruction is scheduled using the appropriate content standards and grading practices while providing rigorous learning opportunities.

Each student (Grades 2 - 12) will have access to a system-issued Chromebook.

Students and staff are required to wear face coverings.

Elementary school students must commit to this model for nine weeks at a time. Middle school students and high school students must commit to this model for a full semester.

Should a school closure occur, all traditional option students will remain at home to learn remotely via Google Meets.

Parents must complete Caredox registration immediately. |
|---|---|
| Virtual Learning through Google Meets (teacher guided learning) | Virtual instruction will be facilitated by a Lowndes County School System teacher. Instruction will be via Google Meets and other instruction resources using the appropriate content standards and grading practices while providing rigorous learning opportunities. Instruction will be facilitated by a teacher, daily. Students will be expected to log in and participate daily. **Pre-K students are not eligible for the virtual learning option.**

Each student will have access to a system-issued Chromebook, if requested at virtual registration. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure access to a reliable internet connection on a daily basis.

Elementary school students must commit to this model for nine weeks at a time. Middle school students and high school students must commit to this model for a full semester.

The deadline to enroll is Tuesday, July 28, 2020 on the LCSS website.

*Please understand that virtual students’ schedules may be modified based on virtual course availability.|
Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol reduces the spread of disease.

Supplies will be provided to support healthy hygiene behaviors throughout the day (ex. hand soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels, wipes). Parents may also send in sealed hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, disinfecting wipes, and facial tissues.

Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol will be provided at the building main entrance, in the cafeteria, and in classrooms. These will be systematically checked and refilled. Children will be supervised in the use of these products.

Students will be directed to use proper handwashing techniques with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and shall be allowed regular hand washing breaks throughout the school day. Signage will be posted throughout the school.

Staff and students will be encouraged to cough and sneeze into their elbows or to cover with a tissue.

Lowndes County Schools custodial staff will clean and disinfect on a regular basis to ensure viral spread via surfaces is minimized.

Shared items that cannot be consistently disinfected will be discouraged (stuffed toys, balls, etc.)

Student personal items (such as pens, crayons, and scissors) should be kept separately in individual lockers, cubbies, or containers.

Cloth covered items, such as drapes, pillows, cushions, furniture, area rugs, and all other items not essential to learning, should be removed from classrooms to the degree practicable. Such items not removed must be disinfected on a daily basis or at each exchange of user, using an aerosol disinfectant.

Teachers and students should utilize disinfectant and/or wipes in the classroom to clean and sanitize desks and tables once per day where the same student stays at the same desk or table throughout the day. If a different student uses the desk or table, surfaces must be disinfected between uses. Teachers should also clean frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, light switches, computer keyboards/Chromebooks, mice, interactive boards, and telephones with the wipes. Disinfecting wipes and disinfectants should be kept out of the reach of children.

Teachers and students will be expected to pick up all items from the floor and clear desktops and tabletops at the end of each day to allow for more thorough cleaning each evening.

In accordance with Practicing Prevention and Responding to COVID-19 in K-12 Schools, July 13, 2020: In the event of an exposure, custodial staff will also isolate and deep clean impacted classrooms and spaces. In some cases, facilities or portions of facilities will be closed and deep clean and sanitize impacted classrooms and areas. Closure may be for a period up to 14 days.
Clinics and Student Health

According to CDC guidelines, symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

- Fever (100.4 or higher) or chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell
- Congestion or runny nose
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Sore throat
- Headache

All parent/guardians must complete Caredox registration immediately as this is a requirement for a student to be seen in the clinic. Please understand, if a parent opts out of Caredox, a student will be sent home immediately at the sign of any illness. The following steps will also be taken in our school clinics:

- Students who are sick at school will be sent to the school nurse clinic. If students have COVID like symptoms, the student will be provided a mask if they do not have one and isolated from other students in the clinic for routine reasons (e.g. medication, first aid, or other regular treatments). Isolation will be either in a separate section of the clinic or in another isolation room, depending on the school and clinic size.
- Students who are sick must be promptly picked up from school and staff members who are sick must promptly leave school. Both are subject to the Return to School Guidelines (see Appendix ).
- Students and staff who become ill are required to seek medical treatment and follow the Department of Public Health guidance prior to returning to school. If warranted, a COVID-19 test is required. Staff and parents can self-report positive tests or potential exposure to this form. This form will follow HIPPA and FERPA compliance.
- When cases of COVID-19, for students or staff, are confirmed, the system will work with local health authorities to determine appropriate response. Response will be dictated by the nature of each case.
  - LCS will notify local public health immediately of any positive case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality, as required under HIPPA, FERPA and state law related to privacy of educational records.
  - LCS will notify student’s parents, staff, and teachers who have been potentially exposed of any positive case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality, as required under FERPA.
  - LCS will inform those who have had close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID 19 to stay home and follow state DPH guidance.
  - Recommendations may include quarantine of the individual, quarantine of a specific classroom or grade level, and in extreme circumstances may result in the entire school returning to Virtual Learning for some period depending on the guidance from Department of Public Health. Refer to the Return to School Guide

In the clinics, nurses will wear medical grade personal protective equipment. Touchless thermometers will be used in schools when taking student or staff temperatures.
Communication

We are focused on communicating as clearly and thoroughly as possible during these times. We disseminate information, as it is available.

- Please confirm your contact information is up to date for your child(ren).
  - For change of address please visit [this link](#) for forms and instructions for submitting an address change. Proof of the new address is required.
  - Changes in phone numbers and/or email addresses can be changed by parents via our parent/student portal or can be submitted to the student’s school. Instructions are available at [this link](#).
- Updates will be shared on our website, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Signs provided by the Department of Public Health will be posted throughout all school buildings reminding students and staff of recommended healthy hygiene practices.
- There may be situations where a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19. Each case will be evaluated individually. Schools will communicate with the involved students and families as needed. Due to HIPPA and FERPA privacy requirements, we will not be identifying individuals with COVID-19, and we ask that others not speculate about such instances.

Coping and Resilience

Lowndes County Schools recognizes the impact COVID has on families emotionally. Therefore, mental health support will be provided to support the emotional wellbeing of students and staff.

- Counselors, teachers, and social workers will establish processes to determine individual student needs.
- Social workers and counselors will provide services including access to mental health support. Please contact your school’s counselor for more information.
- Social workers will coordinate with APEX services regarding in-school mental health services are reestablished while expanding services throughout the system to qualifying students.
- Student support staff will work with community partners to establish support services available to students following CDC guidance.

Resources:

- [Covid 19 Toolbox for Students, Parents & Professionals](#)
- [Coronavirus Tips for Families](#)
- [Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus Crisis](#)
Extracurricular Activities and Athletics

Students enrolled in virtual learning may be able to participate in extracurricular activities at their zoned school. Eligibility, participation requirements, rules, and guidelines may vary based on the activity. This participation may be limited if attendance for an in-person class is part of the activity.

All athletic programs that are governed by the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) will follow GHSA rules and regulations. Guidance from local health officials will also be considered. Middle school athletic programs will follow the same guidance as the GHSA high school programs. Any modifications must be approved by the system Superintendent.

Lowndes High School Student Athletes should report the following to the Athletic Trainer, Philip Pieplow at philippieplow@lowndes.k12.ga.us and middle school athletes should report to the middle school athletic director:

- If a high school athlete tests positive,
- If a member of a high school athlete’s household tests positive, and/or
- The athlete’s possible exposure of COVID-19.

For all other extracurricular activities, positive tests or potential exposure to COVID-19 should be reported immediately to this form. This form will follow HIPPA and FERPA compliance.

Face Coverings

Wearing a face covering or a mask is required for students and staff.

Masks should cover both the nose and mouth when worn. Face shields may be worn when social distancing; if face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer’s face and extend to below the chin.

Face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not yet have symptoms.

Individuals should be reminded frequently not to touch the face covering and to wash their hands. Attaching the face covering to a lanyard will help the student keep up with the mask and reduce cross contamination.

CDC Guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks
CDC’s use of cloth face coverings
CDC Considerations for face coverings
Immunizations

The Georgia state requirement of up to date immunizations and ear, eye, dental, nutrition (EEDN) forms remain in effect. The Georgia Forms 3231 and 3300 are required to enroll. The need for all students to be fully immunized is greater during the pandemic.

We understand that some private physicians' services may not be available to some parents and that many parents were hesitant to take their child(ren) to their doctor or health departments during the height of the pandemic due to concern about viral transmission. While that is understandable, the Lowndes County School System cannot waive state and federal requirements that students be up-to-date on immunizations. Students must be up-to-date on vaccinations to prevent the occurrence of diseases.

Lowndes County Health Department is scheduling appointments for vaccinations while practicing all CDC guidelines for safety. The Health Department has three (3) locations in Lowndes County which all Lowndes County residents can utilize.

Please note the state has delayed the Meningococcal booster shot for sixteen-year-olds, which was scheduled to go into effect this year, until the 2021-2022 school year.

Media Center Procedures

Elementary students will not visit the media center. Carts of books will be delivered to classrooms. Middle and high school teachers may schedule partial classes (up to 10 students) for checkout in the media center or books will be delivered to classrooms.

Returned books will be quarantined for a minimum of 72 hours (as per COVID recommendations from AASL) before check in and returning to circulation.

Monitoring for Symptoms

Conducting regular screening for symptoms and ongoing self-monitoring throughout each school day can help reduce exposure. Staff and students are required to self-monitor for symptoms using the COVID-19 Self Screening Questions. (Appendix). Additional health screenings, including temperature checks, may occur in the building as directed by the principal or school nurse.

The most critical tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19 is to ensure any student or staff who is ill or has been exposed to someone confirmed to have COVID-19 does not attend work/school. Thus, no staff or student who has a temperature of 100.4 or higher, is COVID-19 positive, or has been exposed to someone confirmed to have COVID-19 within the previous 14 days will be allowed to be in school. To return to work/school, the ill or exposed individual must meet requirements outlined in the Return to School Guidance (Appendix).
Please also keep in mind that children will still get sick with illnesses that are not COVID-19. To err on the side of caution, additional safety measures will be taken regarding all health issues. All students who are out sick with a fever will be required to be fever-free for 3 days (72 hours) without the use of fever-reducing medicine before being allowed to return to school. This is a change in procedure which previously only required 24 hours to be fever-free before returning to school.

By sending your child to school, you are attesting that your child is healthy, has been fever-free for 72 hours, and has met these requirements in the Return to School Guidance.

New Student Registration
Lowndes County Schools Central Registration is open under the following regulations and guidelines for getting children (PK-12) enrolled for the 2020-2021 school year. Please visit the following website for detailed information

New Student Registration will take place by appointment only. Parents/guardians can schedule an appointment to meet with a registrar ONLINE or by calling the office at 229-245-2250. Only the Primary Custodial Parent or Guardian will be allowed to enter and complete the registration process. No children or other family members may enter the building.

Visitors will be required to wear a mask/face covering and will have his/her temperature scanned and be asked several screening questions prior to entry. Parents are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to complete the Online Enrollment Forms and then make an appointment. If you cannot complete the registration forms online, a paper copy can be downloaded and printed.

All required documentation must be provided at the appointment time.

Open House
Updated Open House events will be posted online as soon as possible.

Physical Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
The Center for Disease Control and the Department of Public Health have found that physical (social) distancing is a key tool to decrease the spread of COVID-19. This means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home with the standard recommendation being 6 feet apart.
The following steps will be implemented in schools to provide physical distancing wherever possible.

- School administrators will plan entry and exit points for their buildings with a focus on social distancing to the extent practicable.
- Schools may place physical barriers such as plexiglass for protection at reception desks, cafeteria kiosks, and similar areas.
- Outside visitors to schools will be limited or not allowed based on community spread. Visitors must be pre-approved by the building Principal for extreme circumstances only. Parents coming to check out their children from school early do not need an appointment, but will enter the building practicing the above mentioned guidelines. Once the child has been called to the office, the parent will need to wait outside the building and their child will come out to meet them. The child will be escorted out to the parent based on age requirements. In the future, with reduced levels, if visitors are allowed, visitors will need to make appointments and abide by provided guidelines (wear a mask that covers both nose and mouth, complete a symptom checklist, and submit to a temperature screening) before entering the building.
- Professionals and itinerants traveling between schools who provide essential services will follow the same screening guidelines as building level staff. This includes, wearing a face covering, temperature checks, and symptom screenings which will be kept on a screening log at the front office.
- No volunteers will be allowed in classrooms until further notice, some visitors may be pre-approved by the building Principal for extreme circumstances only.
- Class changes and other transition routines will be determined by individual school administrators giving consideration to:
  - Schools will work with their specific layouts to structure crowd flow and reduce clustering or crowding in hallways during transitions and in morning/afternoon release.
  - Designated flow paths and signage to control the flow of foot traffic in buildings will be developed and applied within the schools.
  - Staff will be present to monitor arrival and dismissal to discourage congregating and encourage students to go straight from a vehicle to their classrooms and vice-versa.
- Schools will provide frequent reminders for students and staff to maintain at least a 6 feet distance from one another when feasible.
- Desks and seating areas will be arranged in classrooms to maximize space between students. Students will also face the same direction as much as possible.
- When practical, students will be kept in small cohorts or groups, to limit exposure to others.
  - The same group of students will stay with the same staff when practicable (i.e. all day for young children, as much as feasible for older children).
- Recess will be provided as it is important for student health. Outdoor spread of COVID-19 is also less common than indoor spread. Schools may modify recess in some ways to reduce mixing of classes and during rainy weather. Items, such as balls, will not be shared at recess.
- No field trips will occur until further notice.
- Virtual events such as: field trips, meetings, assemblies, and performances will be utilized when possible.
- School assemblies and other events involving large numbers of students, staff, or visitors will be heavily modified or cancelled if deemed non-essential.
- All meetings with parents (Student Support Team, Section 504, Individualized Education Plan) will be conducted virtually, when possible. Those that must be in-person will be scheduled and planned on an appointment basis.
Protecting Vulnerable Populations

Individuals who are considered high-risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 include people who:

- Are 65 years of age or older,
- Have a high-risk condition, such as
  - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
  - Heart disease with complications
  - Compromised immune system
  - Severe obesity with a body mass index of 40 or higher
  - Other underlying medical conditions, such as diabetes, renal failure, or liver disease.

We recognize that in-person school may not be feasible for staff and students that have high-risk vulnerability due to preexisting medical issues. As such, Lowndes County Schools will provide ongoing Virtual Learning until further notice.

In addition, our staff will review all current plans (Individualized Education Plans, 504 plans, Hospital Homebound, and Individual Healthcare plans) to accommodate students with special healthcare needs and reduce their exposure risk. Lowndes County Schools will continue to use Caredox to provide for HIPPA compliance. Parents are encouraged to select the Virtual Learning Option if their child has underlying medical conditions that decrease immunity or at a higher risk of serious complications. When this option is not selected, parents are encouraged to discuss with the school administrator and nurse.

School Calendar

Please note that all currently scheduled breaks (Fall, Thanksgiving, Winter and Spring) will remain as listed in the 2020-21 school calendar. However, the entire 2020-2021 calendar may have to be modified during the year to accommodate circumstances or the spread of COVID-19.

School Nutrition and Serving Meals

Student’s age, cafeteria size, and staffing will influence the plan implemented at each school. The following practices may be implemented across the district:

- Schools will provide the opportunity for hand washing or sanitizer before eating.
- Various mitigation measures will be used as much as possible, including:
  - Physical distancing at tables between students
  - Classes eating together with distance between classes
○ Sitting on one side of the table, with students all facing the same direction
○ Staggered meal times to allow more time between groups
○ Additional cleaning and sanitizing of tables and trays between groups

- No self-serve for any items (including condiments) will be permitted. Cafeteria staff will place all items on serving trays.
- Students will continue to have food choices, but they will be limited.
- Students will pick up breakfast or lunch and return to the classroom or other specified areas.
- All food from breakfast and lunch eaten in classrooms will be placed in heavy duty trash bags and put in the hallway after each meal.
- Schools may consider the following: required eating in classrooms, spaced serving lines, disposable plates and utensils, etc.

No visitors will be allowed in cafeterias until further notice.

**Student Attendance**

In order to avoid creating any incentives for ill individuals to attend school/work, all perfect attendance awards, school monthly attendance awards, and all other attendance incentives will be waived for the 2020-2021 school year. Lowndes County Schools will still be required to take student attendance and report student attendance data to the Georgia Department of Education. Students are considered to be in attendance when participating in live or virtual instruction. For students choosing the virtual learning option, lack of participation in the course will result in absences and could be a violation of the Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Statute.

Lowndes County Schools cannot completely waive truancy requirements in Georgia law, but will modify the process to avoid punitive action due to COVID 19 related absences. Schools will work with parents to resolve attendance issues related to illness.

**Transportation**

Physical distancing is most challenging on a school bus due to the limited space available. Strict physical distancing between riders of 6 feet is not practical as it would require as few as 12 riders per bus. It is **required that all students and staff wear a face covering while riding the bus** to and from school. LCS transportation is also taking the following steps:

- All riders will be assigned seats on the bus.
- Buses will be cleaned between the morning and the afternoon routes each day. As much as possible, buses will be wiped down with disinfecting wipes between routes (MS/HS and ES).
- For confirmed COVID cases, buses will be taken out of service to be disinfected.
- To maximize air circulation, roof hatches will be opened (weather permitting).
- Response protocols are being developed for how to handle sick students at a stop location, and for identifiable illness while students are on the bus.
● Children who become sick during the day may not ride the bus home.
● In an effort to reduce the number of students on a bus, parents are encouraged to transport their students to and from school when possible. This is especially encouraged if you are not comfortable with your student riding the school bus under these safety measures.

**Water and Ventilation Systems**

For the reopening of school, water fountains will be turned off. Students, teachers, and staff are encouraged to bring their own water bottles for personal use. Bottle fillers and gooseneck faucets should be used to refill water bottles throughout the day.

It is also important that ventilation systems operate properly to maintain appropriate circulation of outdoor air. LCS monitors units to ensure air exchanges are operating according to design and industry standards.

**YMCA Primetime**

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Family YMCA Primetime Program is a state licensed and certified quality service for the community to support working parent/guardians and their children at every Lowndes County Elementary School from the time school is dismissed until 6:30 PM.

Each Lowndes County Elementary School will be offering YMCA Primetime for the 2020-21 school year for students enrolled in face to face instruction. Primetime registration will be available on the YMCA website during the week of Preplanning. YMCA Primetime employees will follow CDC guidelines for staff screenings and sanitation.

The Valdosta YMCA, in accordance with all current protocol from YMCA of the USA, CDC, South Health District and GA Department of Early Care and Learning, will be implementing the following safety protocols during the licensed PrimeTime program:

- Temperature checks with infrared touchless thermometers for all students and staff before admittance to the licensed area.
- Sanitization of all high touch surfaces throughout the licensed area before, during and end of PrimeTime program.
- Mandated masks and gloves for PrimeTime staff.
- Structured protocols for hand washing and sanitizing throughout the program for both participants and staff.
- Technology based participant checkout (parents remain in car) with electronic signatures and post-program temperature verification.
DPH DOES NOT recommend using a test-based strategy for returning to school for children or adults (2 negative tests at least 24 hours apart) after COVID-19 infection.* CDC has reported prolonged PCR positive test results without evidence of infectiousness. Although persons may have PCR-positive tests for up to 6 weeks, it remains unknown whether these PCR-positive results represent the presence of infectious virus. At this time, PCR positive specimens capable of producing disease have not been isolated more than 9 days after onset of illness.

More information about the science behind the symptom-based strategy for discontinuing isolation can be found here.
Covid-19 Pandemic: Returning to School

When a person contracts the virus, symptoms may develop within 2-14 days from exposure, although some people never show symptoms. It is very important for your own safety and for the safety of others that you monitor your health for 14 days from your last exposure to COVID-19, and that you remain at home, avoid congregate settings and public activities, and practice social distancing. Below are the requirements for returning to school.

### SYMPTOMATIC

Individuals with a **confirmed case of Covid-19** or suspected exposure to Covid-19 that are **showing symptoms**, which may include: fever (100.4+), cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

- **At least 10 Days since:**
  - Positive lab test
  - Exposure to someone with Covid-19
  - First appearance of symptoms

- **At least 3 days (72 hours) since recovery:**
  - Fever-free for 3 days
  - No fever-reducing medicine for 3 days
  - Improvement in symptoms

### ASYMPTOMATIC (NO SYMPTOMS)

1. **Individuals with a confirmed case of COVID-19 but are not showing symptoms**

   - **10 days**
   - At least 10 days have passed since the positive lab test and the person remains asymptomatic

2. **Individuals with a known exposure to someone with Covid-19 but are not showing symptoms**

   - **14 days**

Complete **all requirements** in the Department of Public Health guidance for persons exposed to COVID-19 at [https://dph.georgia.gov/contact](https://dph.georgia.gov/contact), which include:

- Quarantine yourself at home or be tested for Covid-19
- Monitor your health for symptoms (including checking your temperature twice a day) during the 14 days after the last day you were in close contact with a person confirmed Covid-19.

Covid-19 Daily Self-Screening Questions

- Do you have a fever (temperature over 100.4°F or 38°C) without fever reducing medications?
- Do you have a recent loss of smell or taste?
- Do you have a cough?
- Do you have muscle aches?
- Do you have a sore throat?
- Do you have shortness of breath?
- Do you have chills?
- Do you have a new or unusual headache?
- Have you experienced new onset of any gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or loss of appetite in the last few days?
- Have you, or anyone you have been in close contact with, been diagnosed with Covid-19 or placed in quarantine for possible exposure within the last two weeks?
- Have you been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by a medical professional or a local public health official within the last two weeks?
- Are you awaiting a Covid-19 test result?

If you reply YES to any of the questions on the checklist, stay home.

If you begin to feel ill while at school, you should immediately go home. You will be expected to leave school and self-isolate until all appropriate criteria for your return are met based on the Department of Public Health Guidance.