



GERMANTOWN CENTRAL SCHOOL

123 MAIN STREET
GERMANTOWN, NY 12526

August 17, 2021

Dear Germantown CSD Community,

The NYS Education Department (NYSED) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) both maintain the standpoint that schools should be open for in-person learning and students should be in school. In accordance with NYSED and the CDC, all Pre-K-12 students at GCS will return to full time in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year. This was shared with the community in the district's preliminary school opening plan at a public Board of Education meeting last week in addition to previous communications. Students need to be in school for both academic purposes and for their social-emotional wellbeing.

The first day of school is scheduled for Wednesday, September 8. The district's finalized plan will be presented and reviewed by the Board of Education at its meeting on August 25 at 6:30 p.m. in the High School library.

On August 6, we shared that the NYS Department of Health informed school districts that they will not provide reopening guidance for the start of this school year, which is different from last school year. In response, NYSED released a [Back to School Health and Safety Guide](#) on the evening of August 12 to help schools and districts as they plan for the 2021-22 school year. NYSED's guidance is aligned with current CDC guidance.

Germantown CSD is creating its school opening plan based on NYSED's guidance, the [CDC guidance](#) and in coordination with Questar III BOCES and other regional school districts. Any additional state or county guidance received by school districts in the future will be incorporated into our district's plans.

Germantown CSD's preliminary opening plan outlines specific health and safety guidelines, such as physical distancing in classrooms, face coverings for all students and staff regardless of vaccination status, and ongoing cleaning and disinfecting. Our goal for September is to bring all students back to our classrooms and to provide them with engaging in-person instruction for the duration of the school year. We are mindful, however, that the cooperation, support and flexibility of everyone is essential to ensure our health and safety protocols keep our kids in class.

The district will present the school opening plan to stakeholders and respond to feedback prior to the start of the upcoming school year. The opening plans will be adjusted as needed in response to the evolving situation regarding COVID-19 and community transmission levels.

Preliminary Opening Plan (*subject to change*)

Multi-Layered Mitigation Strategies

Many of the health and safety guidelines put in place last year, which helped prevent COVID-19 outbreaks, will continue indefinitely to ensure the safety of students, staff and families:

- Regular cleaning and disinfecting of school buildings and buses
- Improved ventilation in all school buildings



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- Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Respiratory etiquette: cough or sneeze into your mask, use a tissue or the inside of your elbow
- Stay home when sick and call your family physician
- Potential surveillance and point-of-care testing of students and staff in schools

Face Coverings

In accordance with CDC and NYSED guidance, face masks covering both the mouth and nose will be required for all students, staff and visitors inside schools and on school buses regardless of vaccination status. Masks will be optional when outdoors on school property. Students will be provided mask breaks when seated in class and socially distanced.

****CDC guidance also indicates that in the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if both the infected student and the exposed student correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.***

Given this guidance from the CDC, the district anticipates that fewer students will likely be quarantined by adhering to the recommendation to require mask wearing in our schools regardless of vaccination status.

Social Distancing

Our schools will maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms. The district can comply with this guidance while fully accommodating all students for instruction.

Transportation

All students and staff must wear face masks while riding on a school bus regardless of vaccination status. CDC guidelines permit buses to operate at full capacity. Windows and roof hatches will be open to increase ventilation on the bus. Cleaning and disinfecting will continue following each bus run daily. All students will be placed on a bus route for the upcoming school year. However, if parents plan on driving their children to and/or from school, they are asked to please inform the district office to assist with our planning. Please call 518-537-6281 or email Transportation Supervisor Diane Palazzo at dpalazzo@germantowncsd.org.

Cafeteria

Appropriate physical distancing will be maintained in cafeterias and eating areas to provide necessary meals to all students in attendance. Seating arrangements for students are being made to ensure as much physical distancing as possible within space constraints. Layered mitigation protocols will include hand washing or hand sanitizer before and after meals; limiting mask removal to the duration of eating and drinking; cleaning and disinfecting between lunch periods; and providing increased ventilation of seating areas.

Athletics

Interscholastic sports will be offered to students this fall. In accordance with CDC guidelines, it is recommended that schools currently located in regions classified as a “high” transmission zone must either cancel higher risk sports or ensure that all students participating in higher risk athletic teams are



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fully vaccinated. For the fall season, this requirement affects participants in volleyball. The district is conferring with other schools within our league and the NYS Public High School Athletic Association to examine this requirement. Parents of all students including those registered for interscholastic athletics are encouraged to consider vaccination in consultation with your child's primary care provider. The district is also reviewing requirements to implement a surveillance testing program of student athletes among other students in accordance with CDC recommendations. Parent/Guardian consent for testing of students is required in all cases.

Music

Band and chorus will continue to maintain the six-foot social distancing of students during instruction. Wind and brass instrumental instruction will make use of bell covers for instruments to prevent aerosol spread, similar to the end of last school year. Outdoor instruction will be considered as weather permits.

Physical Education

When indoors, students should maintain six feet social distancing during physical education instruction. Physical education teachers will prioritize outdoor activities as weather permits.

Classroom Desk Cleaning

In accordance with CDC recommendations, in general, cleaning once a day is sufficient to remove potential viruses that may be on surfaces. Daily disinfecting removes any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection. Classroom desks will not need to be disinfected after each period. Surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected daily by custodial staff. High touch surfaces will be given additional cleaning and disinfecting.

Lockers

Students will be allowed to use lockers during the school day.

Contact Tracing/Quarantine

The district is discussing contact tracing and quarantine protocols with the Questar III BOCES Health and Safety team and the Columbia County Health Department. More details are expected on the contact tracing and quarantine requirements in the near future.

Testing

The district is working with Questar III BOCES, other schools and the Columbia County Health Department to develop and implement a voluntary COVID-19 testing program for students and staff. More details will be released about the testing program(s).

School Events

The Germantown CSD is committed to restoring as many in-person school events as possible this school year including welcome back events, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, etc. Face masks would be required for any indoor events, and they would be optional for outdoor events.



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Full Remote Program

A full remote program through Questar III BOCES is in development for medically eligible students. This program would be a regional full remote program for K-12 students taught by Questar III instructors. Course options may be limited at the 7-12 level. The district anticipates making final arrangements for this program within the next few days and will make the application available to parents this week. **Only students with an immunocompromised condition with a doctor's note will have the option for remote opportunities. Please provide the district with a medical excuse prior to Friday, August 27.**

COVID-19 Vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the pandemic. All eligible individuals are encouraged, **not required**, to receive the vaccine as soon as possible. Currently, there are three vaccines available (Pfizer: ages 12+, Moderna: ages 18+ and Johnson & Johnson: ages 18+). If you have any questions about the COVID-19 vaccine, please contact your family physician. [Find a COVID-19 Vaccine.](#)

Resources

- [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) (CDC)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- [Back to School Health and Safety Guide](#) (NYS Education Department)

We thank our community for your continued patience and support.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Bragg
Superintendent of Schools
Germantown Central School District