



Steve Barnette
Interim Superintendent

August 27, 2021

Dear PCSD Community,

As we are nearing one month into the school year, I would like to update parents and our community as we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on in-person teaching and learning.

As a district, we are committed to transparency because parents need to have all the information that is available to make the right decisions for their students. We maintain a public COVID-19 web page where we share the most current data about how the virus is impacting our 33 schools. Link: <https://www.paulding.k12.ga.us/Page/45777>. The information posted there reflects every case we are aware of at that time and is subject to be revised as more information becomes available. It provides two perspectives of the data, and we publish these reports every Monday and Thursday.

There are a wide variety of opinions and expectations regarding in-person instruction among the families of the approximately 30,000 students we serve. Last year, our operations were defined in large part at the state level; whereas this year, we have more local flexibility requiring more nuance to respond to the wide range of views. To the best of our ability, we are trying to manage this as a community. Hopefully, you have had a chance to look at the board-approved School Operations (Opening) Plan we sent out before the start of the school year. The plan emphasizes that the four-tiered, color-coded, escalating practices provide flexibility to adjust and adapt to evolving pandemic-related challenges. Please familiarize yourself with the levels and make contingency plans for each.

We started the school year with all schools at the Yellow status level but we have since had to escalate several schools to Orange status. We have also shifted some schools to a temporary Red status where we implemented Digital Learning Days (DLD). While some school communities have seen a moderate impact, in other areas the virus is highly present. The health and safety of our students and staff are always our highest priority and focus. Keeping up with confirmed cases of COVID-19 and close contacts, as well as notifying those affected and informing them of our protocols, is a major challenge, but we have an effective tracking system in place and schools are working diligently to input current data, which is then reported on our website referenced above.

We have observed in our data that often the virus has been contracted outside of school and brought into the school environment. We monitor the close contacts, their exposure origin, and those who then become positive. At a few schools, we have seen a significant impact on staff: teachers, paraprofessionals, nutrition workers, custodians, bus drivers, and clerical staff. The availability of school staffs is one of our primary considerations and will often account for shifts from Yellow, Orange, and Red (DLD) operational statuses. We have heard the question, "What are the data metrics for determining when to adjust a school's color status?" There are a number of factors we consider when determining what the protocols should be at a particular school: the number of confirmed cases by onset date, the number of close contacts by onset date, the ratio of positives per 100 students, moving averages and trend lines, the availability of staff and substitutes, and the input from the school administrations. We have a COVID-19 Taskforce in place to frequently assess this data before making decisions and to regularly review the comments and suggestions we receive on our website.

We are committed to providing every student with continuous access to high quality instruction as we shift between safety levels. All of our schools are prepared to shift to Digital Learning Days if needed, and our teachers have plans and technology resources to transition to virtual instruction seamlessly. We know that shifting from in-person to virtual instruction places a burden on families, and we want to assure you that we will make every effort to give parents as much advance notice as possible when we make such operational changes.

As you may be aware, we recently received new guidance from the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH). This guidance strongly suggests that school districts require students identified as close contacts to confirmed positive cases in schools, and vaccinated students who became close contacts outside of school, to wear masks if they choose to be at school during the quarantine period, and we have adopted that protocol for our Yellow and Orange levels (see attached diagrams). That is a change from how we began the school year, so we appreciate your support in helping us follow the most current health guidance from DPH.

As I write this, I am working from home in isolation myself, having recently tested positive. So far, my symptoms are mild, and I believe the fact that I am vaccinated will help ward off more serious effects. Yesterday, I was on a call with Wellstar Health System where they announced that 91 percent of their COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated, 95 percent of ICU patients are unvaccinated, and 96 percent of patients on a ventilator are unvaccinated. In Paulding County, only about 35 percent of the population has been vaccinated. I want you to be aware that, earlier this week, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for persons 16 years of age and older. Thankfully, because I self-quarantined as soon as my first symptom appeared, I have no close contacts at the school district. Under any level of our plan, it is critical that you keep your child at home if they are running a fever or showing any signs of illness.

Our goal is to manage COVID-19 as a community, and I believe that if we all make sound and responsible decisions both on our school campuses and outside our school campuses, it will have a profoundly positive effect on the health of our community and our ability to continue offering in-person instruction for Paulding County students.

To end on a positive note, I want to remind you that there are so many great things going on inside our schools and classrooms each and every day. During these challenging times it's easy to lose sight of the extraordinary work of our staff and students and the amazing things they are accomplishing academically, athletically, and socially. Please take a few moments to encourage your teachers and administrators. On behalf of the staff of the Paulding County School District, I appreciate your flexibility and understanding as we adapt and adjust to maintain the safest and healthiest learning environment for all students.

Sincerely,



Steve Barnette
Interim Superintendent





YELLOW QUARANTINE PROTOCOL

FOR STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS CLOSE CONTACTS

Where did close contact with confirmed case of COVID-19 occur?

IN SCHOOL:

- Student may attend school.
- Student must wear mask while at school through Day 14, if medically able.
- If medically unable to wear a mask, student must quarantine at home under DPH guidance.
- Student must remain symptom-free. If symptoms develop, student must quarantine at home under DPH guidance.

OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL:

VACCINATED

UNVACCINATED

- Student may NOT attend school.
- Student must quarantine at home and follow DPH guidance, which can be found at link and in red DPH graphic at left: <https://dph.georgia.gov/dph-covid-19-guidance>

OPTION 1: Return Day 8

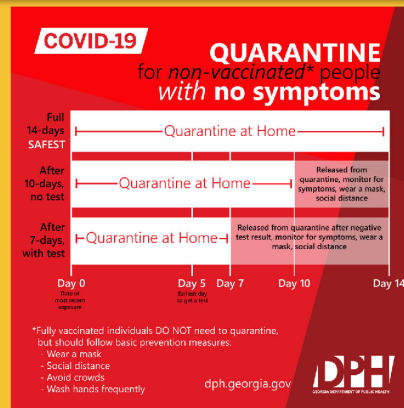
- Proof of PCR/Antigen negative test required, with specimen collection after Day 5;
- Student must wear mask from Day 8 through Day 14.

OPTION 2: Return Day 11

- Student must wear mask from Day 11 through Day 14.

OPTION 3: Return Day 15

- No mask required.



Quarantine Guidance: What to do if you were exposed to someone with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) | Isolation Guidance | Georgia Department of Public Health



ORANGE QUARANTINE PROTOCOL

FOR STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS CLOSE CONTACTS

The following quarantine protocol is based on guidance provided to school districts by the Georgia Department of Public Health.

QUARANTINE:

UNVACCINATED STUDENT:

Keep your child at home except in the case of emergency or to be tested for COVID-19. If your child does not experience any COVID-19 symptoms (fever, 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), your quarantine may discontinue after 10 days of remaining symptom-free and your child wears a mask in the school setting, if medically able, through the 14-day quarantine period. During the quarantine period, your child may utilize Canvas for class work during his/her absence from school.

VACCINATED STUDENT:

(FULLY VACCINATED STUDENT OR RECOVERED FROM COVID-19 WITH DOCUMENTATION WITHIN 90 DAYS)

You may elect to send your child to school during the 14-day quarantine period if the following conditions are met:

- o The close contact exposure occurred in the school setting, and
- o Your child wears a mask, if medically able, and
- o Your child remains COVID-19 symptom-free.

MONITOR:

For a period of 14 days, take your child's temperature twice per day and monitor for any symptoms of respiratory illness. If at any time, your child experiences any symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever (a measured temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or a feeling of feverishness), chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell, the quarantined child shall be considered a person with suspected COVID-19 and shall follow the requirements for isolation by the Georgia Department of Public Health: <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>, contact your healthcare professional as needed, and keep your child home from school.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires that we remain vigilant in our daily lives until we can safely return to everyday activities, and we appreciate our community coming together to help slow the spread of coronavirus disease. For additional information regarding PCSD's COVID-19 response and protocols, please review our district's COVID-19 webpage at: <https://www.paulding.k12.ga.us/Page/45777>.