



New Hanover County Schools  
Back to School 2020-2021  
Family Guide

Published July 20, 2020

Dear New Hanover County Schools Families,

As the start of the 2020-2021 school year approaches, there is much uncertainty about school opening under the pressures created by the ongoing presence of COVID-19 in our community. New Hanover County Schools Back to School 2020-2021 Family Guide is a living document and one of many resources that NHCS is creating to answer your questions about school opening. It will be updated frequently to reflect the most current state guidelines and district policies, procedures, and resources that are available to you and your family.

You can view state guidance on school reopening on following websites:

NC Department of Public Instruction

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/news/covid-19-response-resources/lighting-our-way-forward>

NC Department of Health and Human Services

<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#schools>

**The information included in this guide is subject to change.**

Please note that this information is accurate as of the publication date. New Hanover County Schools is continuing to monitor guidance provided by federal, state, and local public health agencies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will provide updates as needed. Updated information will be communicated on [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net), through Blackboard Connect 5 email and phone call notification, and through NHCS Facebook and Twitter channels. Please follow NHCS on social media and make sure your school has your most current email and phone number.

# Teaching and Learning

We are committed to challenging and engaging students in relevant, rigorous, and meaningful learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced many uncertainties, including how we will return to school in August and how that learning environment could change over the course of the school year.

*All instruction under Plans A, B, and C will be relevant, rigorous, and meaningful.*

It's our core belief that all students deserve to be challenged and engaged in relevant, rigorous, and meaningful learning each day. This school year, regardless of which learning environment your child attends, they will be taught rigorous content every day that aligns with North Carolina's grade-level standards.

Here's what will be the same across all learning environments and across all schools:

- All students will have the same grading structures, as outlined in Board Policy 7410.
- Students will be counted as present if they complete their daily assignments, either online or offline or the student has checked-in with their appropriate teacher(s).
- All classes will use similar, district-supported learning materials, texts, and instructional tools.
- All students will get appropriate support and services through the general education program, special education, Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, Academically & Intellectually Gifted (AIG), English as a Second Language (ESL), and intervention.
- All students will get support from their counselors, social workers, and school psychologists, as needed.
- All schools will focus on establishing effective relationships and community.

## Learning Environments

Families have sent a clear message: they want options for their children. Many are excited to return to their school campuses; many are not yet ready.

For those who want to return to a school campus, state officials have requested that school districts develop three plans (A, B, and C) for different learning environments to operate in the 2020-2021 school year. The plan in which we operate will be based on state and local officials, NCDPI guidance, and NCDHHS guidance regarding the safe reopening of schools.

To accommodate a variety of needs, all students will have the option of attending our School Based Virtual Academies if they are not ready or able to return to a school campus. Details are included in the NHCS School Based Virtual Academies section of this document with more information available soon.

To meet the requirements outlined by the State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction, NHCS has developed three plans for the 2020-21 school year.

### **Plan A - Minimal Social Distancing**

Under Plan A, school facilities are open and all students are present at the same time in school buildings. Enhanced health protocols are required, with other protocols recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services to be considered. Teaching and learning is traditional with preparation in place for blended learning. This environment is the most familiar to students and parents. Students receive daily, in-person instruction and support from school employees.

### **Plan B - Moderate Social Distancing**

Under Plan B in New Hanover County Schools:

- All Pre-K-12 students will attend face-to-face instruction on an alternating three-week schedule.
- Students will be assigned to groups (1, 2 or 3). Siblings will be in the same groups. Groups will attend school in an ongoing rotation by attending school in person for one week and receiving online instruction for two weeks.
- The district recognizes there some students with global delays who, by the nature of their disabling condition, have not demonstrated the capacity to gain meaning from remote learning models. For these students, expanded in-person services may be offered.
- English learners (newcomers) in their first 2 years of instruction will attend daily.
- A full K-12 school-based virtual academy through the student's home school will be provided for families who selected home learning for their student.

Both face-to-face and virtual learning environments will have high expectations and will result in work that contributes to the student's overall grade. Teachers will strategically place learning opportunities in each environment to create an overall experience that aligns to rigorous state standards for the grade level or course. Experiences during online instruction will be a combination of recorded and live instructional sessions.

### **Plan C - Remote Learning Only**

Under Plan C, no students are present in school facilities. All learning opportunities will happen remotely and will include recorded and live instructional sessions.

### **NHCS School-Based Virtual Academies**

K-12 families will have the option to choose the NHCS School-Based Virtual Academies for fully online instruction in the 2020-2021 school year. More information on application procedures, including a commitment letter with deadlines, will be available soon.

### **Electronic Devices & Connectivity**

iPads at the elementary level and laptops at the middle and high school levels will be available for check-out for remote learning. The district will provide connectivity options for students when they are in remote learning.

### **Athletics**

New Hanover County Schools has resumed limited athletics under Phase 1 of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's guidelines. Current guidelines are listed at [www.nchsaa.org](http://www.nchsaa.org). All athletic activities are voluntary for student athletes. NHCS will continue to follow NCHSAA and New Hanover County Health Department guidance regarding athletics and will provide updates as new information becomes available.

### **Co-Curricular Activities**

At this time, all co-curricular activities are on hold until further information is available and until further planning can occur.

### **Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities**

At this time, all district and school-based field trips are on hold until further notice.

### **Visitors and Volunteers**

NHCS schools and administrative facilities will continue to be closed to visitors except by appointment or at the discretion of the school principal.

# Student Support Services

To address the concerns and stress you may be experiencing, the following tips can support your family during this time:

- Stay connected with caring friends and family.
- Stay connected with plans for the opening of the new school year through [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net) and NHCS on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Access resources made available to you and your family for any needs you may have. If you have unmet needs, please contact 211 for assistance.
- Prepare your children in following the 3 Ws: wear your face covering properly, wait 6 feet distance from others, and wash hands well. When out in public, practice using the distance markers on floors to maintain appropriate distancing.
- Prepare your children for changes they will find when arriving at school such as: new traffic patterns in the hallways, staff wearing face coverings, smaller class sizes, keeping materials (pencils, markers, etc) to yourself, and not touching each other or each other's belongings.

We know that school is a necessary part of our community. We are doing everything we can to be able to learn and work all together in the safest way possible. We expect to continue to:

- Cultivate a sense of belonging and community.
- Provide structures for physical and emotional safety.
- Provide tiered supports for meeting the needs of all students.
- Provide access to overall health services for optimal developmental and learning outcomes.

## Special Education

- Expanded in-person services may be offered for some students with global delays who, by nature of their disabling condition, have not demonstrated the capacity to gain meaning from remote learning models.
- Services for students with medical conditions that place them at increased risk will be determined by the student's IEP team and may include a different ratio of in-person/remote learning options than their same-aged peers.
- Students with communication needs, such as deaf and hard of hearing, speech/language, articulation, or other identified needs, will be provided with clear masks to minimize any impact face coverings may have on language development or communication.
- Increased sanitation and cleaning will be performed on equipment and surfaces.
- Families of students with special needs may participate in their child's health screening upon arrival at the bus stop or school. The health attestation form may be utilized as the

safest possible option for a child with specific medical, physical, or intellectual needs if an adult is not available to provide information at drop off.

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

We recognize that the pandemic has caused stress and emotional health concerns for families, students and staff. We have taken these needs into consideration and will be working with staff to provide support for your student. Below are some signs students may exhibit if experiencing concerns.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.
- Potential use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

We encourage parents to contact your school counselor if you feel your child is experiencing emotional or mental health symptoms. You can reach them by phone or email by visiting [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net).

In addition, NHCS offers School-Based Mental Health Services in almost every school through partnerships with local providers. These services can be offered while students are in face-to-face and remote learning. If you are interested in exploring school-based therapy for your child, you can find the contact information for the provider serving your school at [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net) under Divisions/Student Support Services.

Your school can provide you with assistance and direction with any mental health and social-emotional supports needed even if it is not offered on site at your child's school.

For additional mental health information and resources, you can access the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov)'s website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) under Coronavirus Disease 2019/Coping With Stress.

### **After School Programs**

After school programs are under review. More information will be available soon.

# Transportation

To promote social distancing, no more than one student will be seated on a school bus seat at a time. Exceptions can be made for family members. This will include face masks, limiting seating, enforcing safe walk zones, and combining individual bus stops to fewer community stops. To facilitate the reduced capacity on school buses, increasing the number of routes per school will be necessary.

Families should print, complete, and sign an Attestation Form daily for every student who rides the bus. See the Symptom Screening/On School Buses section of this document for details.

All K-12 students riding a bus must wear a face covering unless there is an exception due to developmental, medical, or behavioral health needs. If a student cannot wear a face covering, they will be required to complete a form to notify transportation services. Forms will be available at schools and [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net). Students who do not wear a face covering on a bus must remain socially distanced six feet from other people on the bus, which will reduce the bus capacity and require adjustments to bus routes.

Hand sanitizer will be available on all school transportation vehicles for safe use by employees and older children. Touch points, including doors and windows, grab handles, arm rests, hard seats, door handles, and seat belt buckles, will be cleaned and disinfected between each bus run with an EPA-approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Every bus will be cleaned between morning and afternoon runs and at the end of each day.

# Meal Service

Our child nutrition employees will continue to prepare food in our school kitchens following very strict food safety and sanitation procedures required by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), and NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI).

All students will eat in their classroom. Secondary students taking advantage of school meals will utilize the cafeteria serving lines and return to their classroom on a continuous, staggered schedule with additional points of sale for social distancing. Elementary students will be served meals in their classroom. All meals will be individually packaged for direct service to students.

The [2020-2021 school year free and reduced-price meal benefits application](#) is available online at [www.nhcschildnutrition.com](http://www.nhcschildnutrition.com). Paper copies will also be available to each student at the beginning of the school year. Questions can be directed to 910-254-4299.

Our menus will continue to feature student favorites, our signature in-house speed-scratch specialties, fresh Got To Be NC farm-to-school fruits and vegetables, and will provide the protein, whole grains, low-fat dairy, fruits and vegetables that are important ingredients in a nutritious meal. A selection of la carte items will also be available at each school.

# Health and Safety

## Symptom Screening

### At Home

- Students should have their temperature taken daily before leaving for school.
- Students should not attend school if they have a fever (100.4 degrees F).
- Parents will be provided with videos and other materials to learn about screening processes.
- Parents will be provided with videos and other materials to learn about COVID-19 signs and symptoms.

### On School Buses

Families should print, complete, and sign an Attestation Form daily for every student who rides the bus. Health officials advise that screening children at home and completing the form every day should reduce students' risk of exposure to illness while riding the bus. Every student must show the bus driver their completed daily Attestation Form upon entering the bus.

- If students do not have the completed and signed daily Attestation Form, they will be asked symptom screening questions before they board the bus.
- A responsible adult or older sibling is required to wait with elementary-age children at the bus stop until screening is complete to help the child return home should health considerations indicate that they are not able to board the bus.
- All bus riders will be expected to wear a face covering. One will be provided to riders that do not have one.
- After arriving at school, all bus riders will be asked the symptom screening checklist questions and have their temperature taken at school, before being allowed to enter the building.
- For students with limited communication or more extensive needs, screening will include dialogue with parent or adult caregiver.

### At School

Our school nurses are public health staff and will continue to be considered the medical expert at each school site. As supervised by New Hanover County Public Health, school nurses will maintain consistent communication and advisement for the care and well being of the school family.

- Staff will be trained on signs/symptoms to refer students for screening. Students exhibiting signs/symptoms will be discreetly provided an isolated space to wait for a parent or caregiver to take them home.
- Staff will be assigned as screeners as students arrive at school.
- Staff will be trained on the proper and consistent use of personal protective equipment.
- Face masks will be provided for students and staff without them.

### **Leaving and Returning to Campus**

Students or staff who leave campus and return during the school day will be re-screened upon arrival.

### **Arrival and Dismissal**

Schools will be limited to a few designated areas of entrance and exits which will be monitored at all times. Staff will be assigned at arrival and dismissal for the following:

- Arrival - Staff will make sure that proper sanitizing takes place prior to the entrance; face masks will be required; no unauthorized persons may enter.
- Dismissal - Staff will make sure that no congregation will take place; social distancing will be monitored.

### **COVID-19 Case Reporting Procedures**

Report any suspected, presumptive, or positive cases to New Hanover County Public Health officials for contact tracing. All affected facilities will be additionally sanitized. Families and staff will be notified of positive cases and provided with information on contacts and how to access screening resources. Facility closures will be determined in consultation with Public Health.

# Healthy School Buildings

## **Cloth Face Coverings**

All adults and students in K-12 settings are required to wear face coverings when they are or may be within 6 feet of another person other than family members. Staff and students must wear cloth face coverings on buses and school transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and on school grounds. Face coverings will be available at bus stops and in schools for staff and students who do not have one.

All K-12 students riding a bus must wear a face covering unless there is an exception due to developmental, medical, or behavioral health needs. If a student cannot wear a face covering, they will be required to complete a form to notify Transportation Services. Forms will be available at schools and [www.nhcs.net](http://www.nhcs.net). Students who do not wear a face covering on a bus must remain socially distanced six feet from other people on the bus, which will reduce the bus capacity and require adjustments to bus routes.

## **Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizing**

Hand washing is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family from getting sick. The CDC recommends everyone wash their hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Teachers will be teaching proper hand washing procedures in the classroom, incorporating hand washing breaks into the school day, and reinforcing hand washing during key times throughout the school day such as before and after eating, using the restroom, and touching shared objects.

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. If soap and water are not readily available, individuals are encouraged to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol). Schools will provide hand-sanitizing stations at every school entrance and exit, in the cafeteria, in every class, and on every bus and transportation vehicle. If your child has sensitivities to hand sanitizer, please communicate this with your child's teachers so they can provide your child other opportunities to clean their hands.

To prepare for a return to campus, please review hand sanitizer best practices outlined at [www.cdc.gov\\_with\\_your\\_child](http://www.cdc.gov_with_your_child).

## **Social Distancing**

Social distancing of 6 feet or more is required by all adults and students in school buildings under Plan B. Floor markings in waiting and reception areas will indicate distancing requirements. Desks and seating will be arranged to provide appropriate social distancing and one-way entries, exits, and traffic patterns will be established to prevent crowding.

## **Cleaning and Disinfecting Procedures**

Buildings will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected throughout the day and every evening. Multiple times a day, custodians will perform the following duties, among others:

- Sweeping, dust mopping, and spot mopping hallways, steps, and stair landings, as well as the cafeteria;
- Cleaning and disinfecting hall water fountains;
- Cleaning and disinfecting bathroom floors, sinks, toilets, urinals, and stall handles; monitoring hand sanitizer, soap, and paper products;
- Wiping and disinfecting high-traffic areas and touch points in halls, common areas, and classrooms, if accessible.

Horizontal and high-touch surfaces and shared equipment will be wiped down between classes. Disinfectants used are EPA-approved for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Current cleaning and disinfecting protocols will continue to be reviewed and enhanced in terms of frequency and intensity.

### **Water Fountain Use**

In response to COVID-19, students will be prohibited from drinking directly from water fountains.

All students are encouraged to bring their own bottled water or reusable water bottles. All water bottles should be clearly labeled with the user's name. It is the students' responsibility to keep track of their water bottles and take them home for regular cleaning.

If students need water and do not have a water bottle, they may ask an employee for a disposable cup to get water from the water fountain.