

MERRILLVILLE SCHOOL CORPORATION

RE-ENTRY FAQs

Please note this is a living document, and more information will be added to help you understand how the school year will proceed.

1. School year

Q. When will the new school year start?

A. The new school year will start on Tuesday, Aug. 18 as originally planned. All students will be permitted to return to school on that date. There have been no changes to the school calendar.

Q. Will schools be open all year? Will these procedures be in place all year?

A. The pandemic shifts rapidly, and we don't know what the rest of the school year may bring. If the situation improves, we may be able to abandon some elements of this plan and return to more normal operating conditions. If cases surge, schools may be ordered to close again, requiring all students to shift to online learning. Should our schools be closed by the governor or the health department, online learning becomes necessary for all students.

Q. If I choose distance learning for my child, can I change to in-school learning later in the year?

A. Parents will have the choice to change their child's plan each trimester. So if you have chosen distance learning for the first trimester, you can choose to send your child to school for the second trimester.

Attendance

Q. Can there be some leeway in the attendance policy?

A. Currently, students may be absent from school on five (5) occasions per trimester without a note from a health care provider. A student who is absent from school due COVID-19 related symptoms will be recorded as a student illness/medical absence. If a student is not ill but circumstances require the student to quarantine, the student's attendance will be considered an excused quarantine absence. Absences will be monitored and before any consequences are imposed, parents will be contacted to discuss the reasons for absences if not already known.

Field Trips

Q. Will there be field trips/study trips?

A. There will be no field trips outside the district. Field trips planned will be to the planetarium at Pierce Middle School and to activities and experiences for our Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program.

Class size

Q. Will class sizes be smaller this year?

- A. You should assume class sizes will be the same as in previous years because we do not yet have the enrollment count on who will be distance-learning.

Childcare

Q. Will there be before- and after-school childcare?

- A. Yes, our plan is to offer this service with our current providers. You will have an opportunity to register your child similar to what you have in the past.

At-School Option

Q. How will teaching and learning be different next school year in the five day at-school option?

- A. Aside from enhanced health and hygiene practices, the courses and classes that students have available will be largely the same as in past years. Our teachers and administrators have been working very hard to prioritize what students must know and be able to do in case there is another school closure. At the elementary level, students will stay in their classroom/cohort groups, much like they always have, to reduce the number of people they come in contact with. Efforts will be made to limit the interactions between student groups at all levels.

Q. If my child has to be out of school for 10 to 14 days due to COVID-19, how will his education continue? Will he automatically enroll in the on-line program?

- A. Students who are absent from school for an extended period of time due to illness will continue to receive his or her education/instruction from a Merrillville teacher(s). The teacher(s) will provide assignments for the student to complete and will be available for consultation with the student and the student's parents. This may be done via distance learning or by assignments being sent home from the classroom teacher. Those details are still being designed. [More information available.](#)

Recess

Q. Will elementary students have recess?

A. Yes! We want students to have a break and get some exercise. The number of students on a playground at any one time may be reduced, but elementary students will have recess. There may be a rotating schedule for the use of playground equipment so all classes can play on the equipment at some time during the week. Playground equipment will be cleaned throughout the day, and students will wash or sanitize their hands before and after recess. They must wear masks if social distancing is not possible.

Restroom

Q. Will students be allowed to use the restroom anytime they want?

A. Students have always had access to restrooms at appropriate times. A teacher typically would not let a student leave a classroom in the middle of instruction unless going to the restroom was an emergency. Students will have access to restrooms, but to reduce the number of students in a restroom at one time, middle and high school students may not use the restroom during passing periods. In that case, students would report to class and ask permission from the teacher.

Distance learning

Q. What if a parent does not want his or her child to return to school due the concerns about COVID-19?

A. While it is important for students to be with each other and their teachers for a comprehensive education, we understand that some parents may not want their child to be in a school building. For those students, we will have an on-line learning option. To help ensure a smooth transition from at-home learning to in-person learning, a family that selects the distance learning option will remain in that option for the trimester. Parents will have an opportunity to decide to continue with distance learning or return to school before the new trimester begins.

Q. What will on-line at-home learning look like?

A. We are developing and refining a rigorous and engaging distance-learning program. We are striving to make the program different from eLearning experienced in the spring.

Students will be required to follow a daily schedule. Students will be expected to log in at specified times of the day to receive instruction and to complete lessons. While we are still developing the program, we anticipate that there will be a

distance learning teacher, monitoring students' engagement and responding to students' questions. More details will be shared soon on how this program will be provided. Chromebooks will be provided.

Students will be directed by their teachers and should engage and be able to independently carry out the tasks assigned.

By enrolling in distant learning, you are committing to complete the first trimester in this environment. Grades will be assessed the same way as grades awarded to their classmates attending class in school five days a week.

Technology Requirements

Every student will be provided with a school-issued device for the sole purpose of completing virtual learning. The device is kept in working order and is not an excuse for missing work, class, etc. Students must have reliable internet access. Internet capacity must be able to support virtual learning in all aspects including live streaming instruction, video, etc. with a minimum bandwidth of 10 Mbps. Contact your internet service provider to make sure that you can support virtual learning.

General Guidelines

- School is daily (180 days according to state requirements) and follows the schedule set for the student.
- Attendance in a virtual setting may be based on a variety of factors, such as work completion, writing communication (formative assessment, email, participation in discussions, etc.), scheduled online instruction and meetings, as well as other factors set forth by the teachers.
- No parent contact during virtual meetings unless previously arranged with the teacher.
- Assessments may be expected to use Google Classroom, various online learning platforms/curricula, and will be monitored via Hapara (technology monitoring software).

Student Expectations

- Complete work independently and according to stated deadlines.
- Be available during the regularly scheduled hours and days of school or time set forth by the teachers.
- There will be face to face time scheduled with your teachers of record, and you must be present on the screen.
- General school rules and regulations will be followed in virtual meetings (dress code, established, appropriate learning area).
- Must have adequate technology skills needed for successful virtual learning.

Parent Expectations

- When students have questions or concerns regarding content, they are directed to contact their teachers.
- Live instructional sessions are reserved for students only.
- Monitor completion of student's authentic work. Verify that the work being completed is the students.
- Provide a learning environment for students that is free from distractions (toys, electronics, and outside responsibilities).
- Attend virtual parent-teacher conferences as needed or requested.
- Although parent facilitation is necessary, the learning experience should be student-driven.

Q. Do I need a doctor's note if I want my child to distance-learn?

- A.** You do not need a doctor's note; however, we will ask you why you chose to keep your child home so we can understand why parents are choosing this option.

Chromebooks

Q. Will devices be provided for students who are distance learning?

- A.** Yes

Transportation

Q. Will students be allowed to ride the school bus?

- A.** The buses will run as normal. Students and bus drivers will be required to wear masks.

Q. Can a parent bring his or her child to school instead of riding the bus?

- A.** Yes. Please be aware that there may be increased traffic on school campuses if more parents choose to drive their children to school.

Q. Will students be assigned a seat on the bus?

- A.** Yes. To help the Lake County Health Department perform contact tracing if necessary for a positive COVID-19 test result, the health department will need to know which students were in contact with each other for more than 15 minutes and fewer than six feet apart. Siblings will be seated together.

Q. Will there be fewer students on the bus to help increase social distancing?

A. Efforts will be made during routing to reduce the number of students riding a particular bus. Parents are encouraged to drive their children to school if possible to reduce the number of students on the buses.

Masks

Q. If a parent does not want his or her child to wear a mask at any time while at school or on the bus, is that an option?

A. The Lake County Health Department guidance states that students and staff members should wear a mask when social distancing cannot be used. If a parent does not want his or her child to wear a mask, then the child should be enrolled in the distance learning program.

Q. Will masks be provided?

A. MCSC will provide cloth and disposable masks for children who don't have one. Parents can purchase school appropriate masks.

Q. If a parent wants his or her child to wear a mask at all times while at school or on the bus, will that be allowed?

A. Yes, that will be allowed.

Q. Will children be required to wear masks?

A. Children will be required to wear masks when social distancing is not possible.

Q. If I choose distance-learning for my child, do I still need to register for school?

A. Yes.

Q. When is the last day to decide whether or not I want my child to physically attend school?

A. That date is still to be determined.

Q. Can a face shield be used instead of a face mask?

A. The purpose of a face mask is to reduce the spread of airborne droplets by providing a seal around a person's nose and mouth. Since a face shield does not provide a seal around a person's nose and mouth, a shield is not as effective at reducing the spread of airborne particles.

Q. Will teachers, students, and other staff members be wearing a mask?

A. According to the CDC, Indiana State Department of Health, and the Lake County Health Department, wearing a mask is an effective way to reduce the

spread of the Coronavirus. To help protect everyone's health, teachers and staff members will have a mask with them at all times and will be required to wear them in certain circumstances. The following circumstances are examples:

- A. When working with students and social distancing of six feet cannot be maintained.
- B. While walking through common areas such as hallways, gyms, and the cafeteria.
- C. Driving a school bus. This applies to coaches who may drive an activity bus.
- D. In a meeting with other teachers, staff members, or parents and social distancing cannot be maintained.

A mask does not need to be worn when a class is meeting outside and physical distancing of 6' is possible. Also, teachers and staff members do not need to wear a mask in office areas where social distancing is practiced.

IEP

Q. My child has an individualized education plan (IEP). How will meetings about my child's IEP be held if visitors' access to schools is restricted?

A. To help preserve everyone's health, IEP meetings can be held by phone, Zoom meeting, Google Meet, or other methods that do not require parents to come into a school building. If a meeting must be held in person, all participants in the meeting must participate in COVID-19 screening, not exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19, and wear a mask while in the school.

Events

Q. Will there be events such as Grandparents' Day, Meet the Teacher, etc?

A. To maintain social distancing and reduce the likelihood of spreading the Coronavirus, these types of events will not be held. The principals will work with parents and teachers to find alternatives to these types of events.

Cleaning

Q. What enhanced cleaning and hygiene measures will be in place in school?

A. Providing an environment that is as sanitary as possible is important to preserving everyone's health. The following enhanced cleaning and hygiene measures will be used:

1. Hand sanitation stations will be installed throughout all of our schools so students and staff members can frequently sanitize their hands. All students will be permitted to carry hand sanitizer throughout the day.

2. In the elementary schools and middle school, students will be grouped and stay in those groups as much as possible to avoid contact with others and to make contact tracing easier to conduct if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school. At the high school level, since students change classes, it will not be possible to develop groups of students who stay together throughout the day. Likewise, given the specialization of equipment for many of the high school classes, it will not be possible for students to stay in a classroom and teachers coming to them throughout the day.

3. Where possible, student desks will be arranged in rows so students can face one direction. This is to reduce the likelihood of a student coughing or sneezing in another student's face.

4. According to the Lake County Health Department, students and staff members do not have to wear a mask when:

- a. social distancing can be used.
- b. all desks in a classroom are facing in the same direction with as much distance between the desks as possible.
- c. outside of the school building for classes, lunch, recess, etc.
- d. participating in physical education classes.

5. Each bus will be thoroughly cleaned after each route (A.M., P.M. and mid-day).

To mitigate the spread of the COVID-19, students and staff will wear a mask at times not listed above. If a student cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, the student's parents should talk with their healthcare provider about whether returning to in-person school is medically appropriate. A face shield may be an acceptable alternative to a mask for students who cannot wear a mask. The Indiana Department of Education will supply one mask for each student.

6. Being able to drink water throughout the day is important to a person's health. However, drinking fountains are high-touch areas where viruses and bacteria can be spread. To provide water for staff and students, drinking fountains will be turned off and touchless water bottle filling stations will be added in strategic locations in each school.

Screenings

Q. Will students and staff members be screened for COVID-19 symptoms as they come into school each day?

A. With over 6,000 students and more than 650 employees, it is not possible to screen each person as they arrive. However, we are asking parents to check their children each morning for the ten (10) symptoms of COVID-19. If a child has any of the symptoms listed below that are not explained by other causes, such as allergies, the child is to be kept at home. Details about reporting

requirements will be provided in the detailed plan for each school. All staff members will be required to perform a self-check and report the results to his or her supervisor.

1. Congestion or runny nose
2. Fever of 100.4 degrees or greater
3. Cough
4. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
5. Diarrhea
6. Nausea
7. Sore throat
8. Muscle pain
9. Chills
10. New loss of taste or smell

Positive cases

Q. What will happen if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

A. If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, he or she must remain home in isolation for at least 10 days from the date symptoms began AND 72 hours fever-free without fever-reducing medications and improvement of respiratory symptoms. For other questions related to COVID-19 exposure and test results, please read the [document provided by the Indiana State Department of Health](#).

Q. Will a school close if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

A. The Lake County Health Department does not believe that a total school closure would be necessary if contact tracing can be performed. Any decision will be made in cooperation with the Lake County Department of Health.

Q. Would a class of students need to be quarantined if one of the students or teacher tested positive for COVID-19?

A. The Indiana State Department of Health discusses this in the [Guidance for Return to School document](#).

Q. Where can I find information about how COVID-19 is spread?

A. The Indiana State Department of Health has developed a [guide](#) that is very useful for parents.

Q. Where can I find information about where to get tested for COVID-19?

A. Information can be found on the [Indiana State Department of Health website](#).

Q. What changes will be implemented in the Nurse's Office?

A. There will be separate areas created in our health clinics - one for regular care and an isolated area for anyone who presents with signs or symptoms of illness. Parents should make an appointment as needed such as to bring medications into the office. If you need to provide medication for your child, a nurse will meet you in a designated area to accept the medication. You can also expect to see changes in how we administer stocked medications, the suspension of nebulizer treatments, and new criteria for staying home from school and returning to school, based on CDC and [Indiana State Department of Health guidelines](#).

Q. Will students be able to eat breakfast and lunch at school?

A. Breakfast and lunch will still be served. To provide social distance, smaller groups of students will be using the cafeteria at one time. Alternate locations for eating will be provided to help reduce the capacity of the cafeteria seating. Also, students may be able to eat outside. Extra measures will be taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

1. All students will wash or sanitize their hands before breakfast and lunch.
2. All staff, cashiers, and students will wear a mask. Students may remove their mask when at their table and when eating.
3. The cafeteria tables will be cleaned between each meal-serving period.
4. No self-serve options for food will be available. Menu choices may be reduced.
5. The floor will be marked to space students while they wait to receive their meals.
6. Students will be reminded not to share food.
7. Students will be dismissed in small groups to return their trays and dispose of trash.
8. To be able to perform contact tracing if needed, a seating chart will be used and students will need to sit in the same seat each day.
9. All purchasing will be done in a cashless manner. Parents are asked to provide funds through online payment.

Q. Can my child bring his own lunch?

A. Yes, students can bring their own lunch and he or she can purchase items such as milk, juice, and water from the cafeteria.

Q. Will social distancing be required?

A. We will practice social distancing when possible. Due to the size of our student body and our schools, social distancing will not be possible at all times. In classrooms, student seating may be arranged to all face the same direction, when possible, and will be spaced as far apart as possible. On buses, we will attempt to have siblings sit together. At lunch, we will maximize available space for distancing.

Q. To help provide social distancing, will the hallways be marked for traffic flow?

A. Yes, we will be providing guidance to students and staggering times of movement to reduce the numbers in a hallway at one time.

Q. How will students know how far apart to be from each other when in a line, such as in the cafeteria?

A. The floors will have markings and teachers will help provide guidance.

Q. Will students be disciplined if they don't follow the social distancing requirement?

A. Even before COVID-19 changed how our world operated, students were expected to respect each other's personal space. We know that it will be tricky for students to stay about six feet apart from each other, so they will receive reminders if they are too close to each other. We cannot guarantee that students will always follow the direction. If a student repeatedly refuses to follow any direction, she/he can be disciplined, but we hope to avoid this situation with gentle reminders.

Q. Since water fountains will be turned off, can my child bring a water bottle to school and will she/he be able to refill it?

A. Students are encouraged to drink water during the day and they can bring a water bottle to school. Also, touchless water bottle fillers are being added to some of the existing water fountains in each school so students can refill their water bottles.

Q. What changes will be implemented on playgrounds?

A. To limit exposure, classroom groups will play at recess within playground zones and will rotate through different play zones throughout the week. Playground equipment will be cleaned daily and students will wash or sanitize their hands before and after recess.

Q. Is there a separate plan for the start-up of athletics?

A. Yes. [Click here for that plan.](#)

Q. Can my child participate in athletics and extracurricular activities while distance learning?

A. Yes, your child may participate in athletics/ extra curricular activities, but he/she must continue to meet all eligibility requirements.

Q. My child seems to be very sad or depressed lately. Is there anyone at school for my child to talk to?

A. Our students have access to a school social worker in every building. Feel free to access the school social worker for assistance.. The school social worker will provide consultation services, supportive resources and community referral resources as needed to assist you with your needs. Contact information for your child's school social worker can be found on the MCSC website, along with an abundance of information and resources located on the [MCSC School Social Work link.](#)

Q. I am worried that there will be a lot of pressure put on students and teachers to get caught up from the time out of school this past spring. Has any thought been given to that?

A. Throughout all of our work this summer in preparation for the new school year, we have followed the idea of hearts before heads. We need to be especially sensitive to the emotional and mental health needs of our students and staff members. Academics are certainly important, but no good teaching and learning can occur if people are scared, worried, or anxious.

Q. Will my child be able to participate in band, theater and orchestra if he/she is distance learning?

A. We are currently working on plans for students to attend these classes.

Q. What happens when someone in school tests positive? Will the entire class be canceled? Will school be closed?

A. We must follow guidelines set forth by the Indiana Department of Health. Please refer to this information [here](#).

Q. My child is transitioning to a new building this year. Will we get a chance to visit the building and take a look around?

A. We are currently working on those plans.

Q. With regard to lunches, will those be hot lunches like usual or cold meals?

A. Hot meals will be available.