

**DETROIT MERIT CHARTER ACADEMY
2021-2022 SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL &
CONTINUITY OF LEARNING PLAN**

Updated: June 21, 2021

Finalized: August 19, 2021

Overview: Consistent with our charter, we believe that the best learning environment for our students includes regular, day-to-day, in-school instruction provided by a teacher. Our goal is to have a traditional, in-school learning environment for our students if this can be accomplished while keeping students and staff safe and healthy. As we pursue this goal, we continually seek guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on best practices in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. This document summarizes our school's safe return to school plan for the 2020-21 school year, which we plan to continue into the 2021-22 school year. As the CDC, state, and local health department guidelines change and are released for the upcoming school year, the school will update its plan and practice. These updates will occur every six months, and more frequently as needed.

If necessary, the school is prepared to transition to hybrid or remote learning environments. We are committed to providing all students with a high-quality education regardless of the learning environment(s) we use throughout the year. In anticipation of possible interruptions to in-person instruction, our management partner, National Heritage Academies (NHA), has provided a Chromebook or laptop device to each student. This investment in technology was made to ensure a seamless transition between models when necessary.

Background on learning models: At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, we knew that changes in our learning model would be required to keep students and staff safe and healthy. We began the school year prepared to operate in various modes as necessary throughout the year. Detailed plans were created around each learning scenario, which included:

- *In-person learning:* a return to a traditional classroom environment.
- *Remote learning:* teaching and learning done completely at home.
- *Hybrid learning:* a combination of in-person and remote instruction.
- *Virtual learning:* teaching and learning in a fully online environment. These students are enrolled in fully online learning regardless of what learning model the rest of the school is using. This option has been available to families all year long.

These detailed plans were created by the school, its management partner, NHA, and its Board. They were made available for public comment when the Board was reviewing and approving it and documented as the *COVID-19 Preparedness & Response Plan* and *Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan*. The approved plan was posted on the school's website and has been available throughout the year at: <https://www.nhaschools.com/schools/Detroit-Merit-Charter-Academy/en/Transparency-Reports>

Personal protective equipment: The school follows CDC, state, and local guidelines for using masks and face coverings. Masks and face coverings can be homemade items or disposable level-one surgical masks. Masks need to be worn by all staff and students throughout the day

unless an underlying health condition or sensory issue exempts them. Reusable masks have been provided to the school for staff use. If students are unable to obtain a mask, additional masks are made available in the school's main office as needed. All students must wear masks whenever they are outside the classroom for reasons such as transitioning and arrival/dismissal, and when social distancing cannot be maintained. Staff and students are required to wash cloth facial coverings or dispose of disposable masks daily.

Students are instructed to use masks properly. In situations where a student is refusing to wear a mask properly, we offer education to emphasize the importance of a healthy and safe school community. In the event of continued non-compliance, the school reaches out to the parent/guardian for support.

We revisit the need to require staff and students to wear masks based on CDC, state, and local health department guidelines.

Social/physical distancing: At least one of the following measures is always required to maintain the health and safety of our school community:

- Social distancing of three to six feet.
- Barriers
- Use of masks/face coverings.

Social distancing reminder signs and one-way traffic floor markings (where possible) are placed throughout the school building. Social distancing floor/seating markings are established in waiting/reception areas. When feasible, the school spaces classroom desks three to six feet apart.

The school uses staggered arrival times and/or multiple entrances/exits to allow for social distancing. Students keep their personal items separate and in individually labeled cubbies, containers, or lockers. Students transition between classrooms at staggered times to allow for social distancing at lockers.

Students eat in their classrooms or eat while socially distanced in the gymnasium/cafeteria.

When possible, teachers rotate in and out of classrooms rather than having students transition. This helps eliminate the need to have student desks wiped down after every class period. However, when student movement does take place, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that every desk has been disinfected before a new group of students enters the classroom.

Whenever possible, specials teachers rotate in and out of the classrooms as well. However, when necessary to use their own classroom/space, all hands-on classrooms are disinfected between student groups. Students should not be sharing personal materials such as pens, pencils, etc. Each classroom has materials to disinfect commonly shared items such as computers and curricular tools.

Hygiene and cleaning: We have made several significant changes with our janitorial service partner, Aramark, such as increasing manpower, changes in management structure, improved

training, greater accountability, and monthly performance audits. In addition to baseline janitorial services, Aramark also provides additional cleaning services due to COVID-19. These include:

- All high touch point locations –light switches, door handles, bathroom faucet handles, and so on – are disinfected three times a day (mid-morning, mid-afternoon, and evening).
- All cleaning materials are EPA-approved for use against COVID-19.
- We continue to clean playground structures with EPA-approved disinfectant.
- Aramark provides the school all necessary materials.
 - Aramark is ensuring that each classroom has hand sanitizer, a spray bottle of Virex Disinfectant Cleaner, paper towels, and instructions on how to properly use the provided materials when additional cleaning/disinfecting is needed in classrooms. Staff must wear gloves, surgical masks, and face shields when performing all cleaning activities.
 - Aramark is also ensuring that the school stocks plenty of hand soap to stay ahead of any shortage. Soap, hand sanitizer, and Virex are refilled, as necessary.
- All janitorial staff are being retrained on cleaning and disinfecting specifically for COVID-19.
- Facilities Preparedness and Response Plan (attached as Appendix A)
 - We have created an action plan to be used if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the school building. This plan includes thorough disinfection and cleaning, which may require a temporary closure of the school.
- We store cleaning and disinfection products safely and in compliance with standards.

In addition to the added efforts of our provider of janitorial services, we are all joining in the effort to promote safe hygiene habits. Handwashing posters instructing and reinforcing proper handwashing techniques are placed in bathrooms.

Monitoring student and staff health: The school cooperates with the local public health department in screening and testing students and staff. When needed, we take students' temperatures outside the school when they first arrive and before they enter it. Trained staff does this work using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, disposable face masks, and face shields.

Staff members must complete daily wellness checks before arriving at work to ensure they do not exhibit COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing). NHA has created a daily health-screening app for this check. Staff members use their mobile device to scan a QR code and complete the required screening survey.

We monitor and follow local health department and state recommendations. If an employee or student shows COVID-19 symptoms or runs a fever of 100.4 or higher, they are sent directly home or to an identified isolation room until they can be safely picked up. When the isolation room is in use, the student and any staff member supervising the student are required to wear masks.

Confirmed cases: If there is a confirmed case, the school's Business Partner from NHA's People Services team –

- reports the case to the local department of health;
- informs NHA's Facilities team to ensure proper cleaning is done;
- partners with NHA's communications team to ensure that proper stakeholders are notified in a timely manner; and
- ensures compliance with employee and student confidentiality and HIPAA requirements.

Staff and students with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 can return to school after they have complied with any CDC isolation guidelines and:

- they have received a negative COVID-19 test;
- ten days have elapsed since the individual first had symptoms; *or*
- at least three days have elapsed since the individual had a fever *or* symptoms have improved.

When there are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases in the building, the Facilities Preparedness and Response Plan calls for a move into a Level 3 Response Procedure. Within 24 hours of the last known presence of a suspected/confirmed case in the facility, all known areas accessed by individual(s) with suspected or confirmed cases are closed and vacated. We close the building fully or partially as deemed necessary by school leaders and their Director of School Quality (DSQ). Aramark personnel prepare for full disinfection after 24 hours has passed. These professionals use enhanced PPE (gloves, face masks, and gowns) during disinfection. Re-entry is forbidden until disinfection is complete. The duration of disinfection depends on the number of areas visited in the facility by the suspected/confirmed case.

Vaccinations: NHA has provided us up-to-date information and resources on vaccination in our state and county. The NHA Business Partner monitors the availability and distribution of the vaccines on a state-by-state and county-by-county basis and provides updates as additional information is released.

Continuity of Learning for Special Populations: If a remote or hybrid learning setting is required, the school ensures equity for all students. Special populations, including students with IEPs, English Learners, and at-risk students, are prioritized for in-person instruction whenever possible. Students with IEPs or 504s access the same learning opportunities offered to general education students. These learning activities and supports address student needs identified in their IEP/504 to the extent appropriate. To accomplish this, special education providers collaborate with general education teachers to ensure provision of accommodations and modifications (when appropriate) that allow students to access learning opportunities. Individualized accommodations are documented and shared with classroom teachers for each student. English Learning (EL) teachers work with classroom teachers to provide necessary scaffolds to schoolwork to ensure that EL students have access to the core content.

The school complies with the regulations imposed by the state and by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that all children with disabilities receive an Individual Educational Program (IEP) designed to address their unique needs. All required components of the IEP are addressed, including a description of the student's present level of academic

achievement and functional performance, including disability-related needs, goals and objectives, supplemental aides and services, program services, ancillary services, and extended school year.

All students with disabilities are considered general education students first. Each IEP is designed to assure that eligible students receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and specialized instruction delivered by highly qualified special education staff within the least restrictive environment (LRE). Before school opens, we review registration forms to identify students with current IEPs from previous schools attended. We inform parents of their rights, procedures, and responsibilities under special education law. Decisions about an IEP are made by the school's IEP Team. This team has required participants, including general and special education providers and administrators. Parents are also encouraged to join the IEP Team.

As much as appropriate, children who are disabled are educated with children who are nondisabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that satisfactory education in regular classes with supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved.

To meet LRE requirements, the school ensures that a continuum of placement options is available to students with disabilities, including:

- services provided within the general education classroom;
- pull-out services;
- special classes;
- home instruction;
- instruction in hospitals and institutions; and
- in special circumstances, access to programs and services in settings outside the school.

The Individualized Education Program Team (IEPT) makes decisions about student placement.

Continuity of food services: We meet all guidance and procedures set forth by the CDC and by state and local health departments related to food service models and operations for students. Meals are served in a unitized manner during the school year to avoid contamination. We provide staff additional PPE, including gloves, masks, cleaning chemicals, and hand sanitizer. Sneeze guards have been added to all food distribution carts. Cutlery, seasonings, and sauces are placed directly on individual trays. Students eat in their classrooms or in the gymnasium/cafeteria with appropriate social distancing.

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, we work with school nutrition agencies and local health departments to ensure that we comply with all requirements. We continue serving food when schools are closed when that is allowed and can be done safely. We continue to provide meal service to the extent applicable. We notify parents when food is available via the SchoolMessenger system (which can send emails and texts to each family), school newsletters and updates, and our website as appropriate.

Mental health, behavioral, and emotional support services and support: Traumatic experiences like COVID-19 can impact learning, behavior, and relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic affects children's emotional health as well as their physical health and academic experience. We believe children's well-being comes first and that young people learn best when they are happy, safe, calm, and cared for properly.

As educators, we need to do everything possible to reduce the effect of trauma so students learn at an optimal level. Trauma does not discriminate between urban and suburban students because people experience threats like COVID-19 individually. Schools and school networks must nurture the hearts and minds of children and staff and respond thoughtfully and innovatively to support our community members' mental health.

School Wide Trauma Informed Care is a tier one support at our school. NHA's Leadership Summit, held each summer, has included a general session, as well as three additional breakout sessions, that highlight trauma-informed education and instruction on social and emotional skills. In addition, we share information on trauma informed support throughout the school year via an emailed newsletter to continue the discussion on trauma, to provide additional resources, and to provide talking points for parents, families, and staff.

The school also prioritizes the mental and social-emotional health of staff. Leaders hold one-on-one meetings with employees that help leaders assess employees' physical and mental health. We also have an ethics hotline employees can use report concerns. Additionally, we give employees free access to an employee assistance program, through which they can access a library of resources for self-care as well as free counseling sessions.

Virtual select option: We understand that not every family may be comfortable with in-person learning at this time. Virtual select learning is an optional form of remote learning for students do not attend in-person classes for some or all of the school year. These students are held to the same state academic standards as students attending school in person.

These students do not spend 100 percent of their day with the virtual classroom teacher. The virtual teacher sets the weekly schedule and pace for virtual learners. All virtual learning includes real-time small-group instruction from the teacher at least five times a week using a video conferencing tool. When students are not participating in small-group time with the teacher, they work independently on assignments posted in Google Classroom. We provide appropriate accommodations to children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans.