



# **COVID-19 Response Plan**

## **2021-22**

FEBRUARY 2022

# Michigan City Area Schools

## COVID-19 Response Plan 2021-22

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## OVERVIEW

Michigan City Area Schools successfully completed the 2020-21 School Year during the COVID-19 pandemic, following a Reopening Plan that was developed in accordance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the State of Indiana, the Indiana Department of Education, and the LaPorte County Health Department. The Michigan City Area Schools district leadership team consulted with employee groups, parents, community members, and school superintendents locally and nationally to develop this plan. Throughout the school year, the plan was adjusted to meet recommendations and requirements set forth by health officials.

The plan has been amended for the 2021-22 School Year to reflect the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will serve as a guiding document for school operations.

Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MCAS district leadership team reserves the right to make necessary changes in the plan. MCAS will continue to update staff, families, and the community as changes are made.

## A. RESPONSE MODEL

Michigan City Area Schools will base its decisions about operations and mitigation strategies on the level of COVID spread in LaPorte County, as announced by the Indiana Department of Health. When a level change occurs, MCAS will provide timely information to all families and staff. The current level will be posted on the MCAS website.

[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE RESPONSE MODEL PLAN SUMMARY](#)

## B. INSTRUCTION

Michigan City Area Schools will provide full-time, in-person instruction five days a week for all students. MCAS will follow the approved school calendar, which is available on the district website.

MCAS acknowledges that some families may feel that a remote learning option is a better fit for their children due to COVID concerns. Last Spring, all MCAS families were provided with an opportunity to enroll in the Michigan City Virtual Academy, which will serve students in grades K-12 through asynchronous and/or synchronous instruction during the 2021-22 school year. For more information about the MCVA program, please visit <http://educateMC.net/MCVA> or contact your child's school principal.

All students will be provided with opportunities to receive instruction and complete missed assignments due to illness or quarantine. Take-home materials and/or synchronous online learning will be provided at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

For information about school absences due to illness, please consult the [MCAS school handbook](#) for your child's grade level.

## C. HEALTH AND SAFETY

### General Health Protocols

- MCAS will follow **Indiana Department of Health** guidance for schools. As of 2/23/22, IDOH recommends a shift from universal contact tracing, case investigation, and exposure notification to a cluster or outbreak-based model.
- **Masks/Face Coverings**
  - Masks/face coverings will be optional for all students, staff, and visitors in MCAS facilities.
  - MCAS will follow federal and state guidelines regarding mask-wearing on school buses. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.)
  - MCAS will supply a face covering to any individual who requests one. Cloth face coverings should be laundered each day they are worn.
- **Handwashing** will be emphasized multiple times a day for all staff and all students, PreK-12.
- **Hand sanitizer stations** will be available at building entrances and common areas such as cafeterias.
- **Signage** and posters will be displayed throughout each school building to remind students and staff of good hygiene habits and other precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- MCAS encourages all students/parents, staff, and visitors to **assess their health** before leaving home each morning.

### Quarantine and Exclusion

- Students or staff who test positive for COVID-19 shall isolate, including **exclusion from school and extracurricular activities**, for at least 5 days following the onset of symptoms, or, if asymptomatic, at least 5 days from the

date of collection of the positive test. Following the 5-day isolation period, the individual may return to school on day 6, providing they are fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications and that their symptoms have improved.

- Students/staff will be **excluded from school** if they exhibit one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19, based on Indiana Department of Health guidance, that is otherwise not explained. As of 1/1/22 this guidance includes the following symptoms:
  - Temperature 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, or chills
  - Sore throat
  - New uncontrolled cough or shortness of breath that causes difficulty breathing (for individuals with chronic allergic/ asthmatic cough, a change in their cough from baseline)
  - Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, or abdominal pain
  - New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever
  - New loss of taste or smell
  
- Once a symptomatic student or employee is excluded from the school environment, they may **return** if they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and their symptoms are resolving.
  
- MCAS will not administer COVID-19 tests at school. MCAS will make COVID-19 tests available to families for home use when they are provided by the Indiana Department of Health for this purpose. (As of February 2022, tests are expected to be shipped to school districts in April 2022.)

## D. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

### Cleaning and Sanitation

Cleaning, disinfection, and sanitation will be performed in partnership with MCAS's custodial provider, Sodexo.

- Nightly **disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces** in rooms that were used during the day will take place. High-touch areas include:
  - Doorknobs
  - Light switches
  - Phones
  - Desks
  - Restroom sinks and toilets
  - Media centers
  - Weight rooms
  - Locker rooms, etc.
  
- In addition to nightly cleaning, COVID-19 will require MCAS and Sodexo staff to conduct **frequent cleanings** throughout the school day.
  
- **Emergency cleaning** will occur in situations where a known infection is connected to a MCAS facility. Depending on the size or complexity of the area requiring emergency cleaning, a room or facility may need to be closed. Details of the closure will be communicated to all appropriate stakeholders.

## Cafeterias

- “Share tables” will be available only for prepackaged food. Students will be **prohibited from sharing** all other food
  
- Cafeterias will be **cleaned** after student use.

## Nurse’s Offices

- **Nurses offices** will be relocated from main office areas as possible, and/or isolation spaces will be established for students and staff who are sick with COVID-19 symptoms.
  
- Nurses and any other staff will be encouraged to wear **personal protective equipment** (PPE) including face coverings when caring for students exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

## Restrooms

- Restrooms will be **cleaned frequently and resupplied** throughout the day. Students will be educated on **procedures** for restroom areas, including physical distancing and handwashing.

## School Buses

- MCAS will follow federal and state guidelines regarding **face coverings/masks** on school buses. (Currently, masks are required for all individuals on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.) This includes extra-curricular activities. Students without masks will be provided with one before boarding a school bus.
- Buses will be **cleaned and sanitized** before and after student use.

## School Offices & Visitors

- Plexiglass **barriers** will be available for use in reception areas at all buildings.

## Other

- **Water fountains will remain out of service.** Students are encouraged to bring their own water (water bottles should be clearly labeled with student name). Touchless water filling stations are available for refills.
- **Field trips** may be limited, based on the level of COVID spread in the community.
- Any outside groups using **MCAS facilities** may be required to cover the cost of disinfecting.
- **The “Dress for Success” program** has been suspended for the 2021-22 school year. A [revised dress code](#) will be in place for all students.

## E. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Staff will receive **updates and training** regarding COVID-19.
- SafeSchools **training** videos on COVID-19 protocols and precautions will be mandatory for all new staff to view.

## F. MENTAL HEALTH

MCAS understands the importance of mental health and the role that it plays in the lives of our students, staff, and families. We are supporting the mental health of stakeholders by providing resources, services, and professional development opportunities.

All schools are staffed by at least one school counselor, and all are served by social workers and/or student success coaches. If a student needs any social or emotional assistance, they should reach out to their counselor.

## G. ATTENDANCE

- Attendance data for all staff and students will be **monitored** daily. Indiana law requires school districts to report to the local health department and the Indiana Department of Education when the percentage of student absences is above 20% of the enrolled students at a school. In addition, MCAS will notify the LaPorte County Health Department when absenteeism reaches 10% for COVID-like illness or when schools are concerned about the level of illness.
- MCAS attendance personnel will request specific symptom information when **absences are reported** along with COVID-19 diagnoses and/or potential COVID-19 exposure. Information obtained will be shared with nursing staff.
- If students are absent from school due to being positive for COVID-19 or being a close contact but are able to complete schoolwork remotely, they are considered present and will be recorded as RCOVID (remote COVID). Students with COVID-19 who are ill and cannot complete schoolwork are

considered absent and will be recorded as ACOVID (absent COVID). An absence due to COVID is considered an “excused” absence from school.

- Any student who is at home due to COVID-19 is to remain current with his/her **school work**. Students too ill to do work should complete work per the timeframe outlined in the Student/Parent Handbook.
- **Employees** who experience COVID-19 symptoms at work will immediately be sent home.
- Since vaccines are readily available, staff will be required to **use accumulated benefit days** for any COVID-19 related absences.

## H. COMMUNICATIONS

- MCAS will provide accurate and timely information to all stakeholders about measures being taken to help keep students and staff safe.
- MCAS will stress with all students and staff the importance of staying home when sick.
- Due to federal privacy measures, it is important to note that the name(s) of any student or staff who test positive for COVID-19 will not be identified in communications.
- MCAS will emphasize the importance of vaccination for all age groups as soon as they are eligible.
- MCAS will publicize guidelines and tailor specific messages for staff and students regarding decreasing the risk of exposure, including the use of face coverings, frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, and physical distancing.
- MCAS will educate families on their important role and responsibilities, including:
  - Students should stay home when sick;
  - Emergency contact information must be up to date;

- Families should plan for the potential need to pick up students from school;
- Best practices for quarantine/isolation and home care

## RESOURCES

- Indiana Department of Health: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov>
- Indiana Department of Health [Parent COVID-19 Daily Screening Tool](#) (updated 12/30/21)
- Indiana Department of Health: [Updated K-12 Guidance for Isolation and Quarantine](#) (updated 2/17/22)