

# COVID RESPONSE PLAN

## SAU 24

### Fall 2021

#### Fall 2021 School-Specific Plans

- [Center Woods Elementary School](#)
- [Center Woods Upper Elementary School/Weare Middle School](#)
- [Henniker Community School](#)
- [James Faulkner Elementary School](#)
- [John Stark Covid Response Plan](#)

## Introduction to SAU 24 COVID Response Plan Fall 2021

The schools and districts within SAU 24 opened in September 2020 under the Continuous Learning Plans developed and approved by each district's school board. Those plans were developed through a representative Continuous Learning Task Force composed of administrators, teachers, staff, and parents. The SAU 24 Fall 2021 COVID Response Plan is an update of the originals and is designed to articulate how we will respond to pandemic concerns that may arise.

Throughout 2020-2021, SAU 24 demonstrated the need to be both flexible and responsive. We have also demonstrated a commitment to operate as normally as possible and still mitigate the risks poised by COVID-19. Looking to the future, this response plan enables us to respond to the specific situation as it impacts a classroom, school, district or the entire SAU.

This plan provides the general principles and guidelines under which we will operate. The specific school-specific details will be developed as part of normal back-to-school planning and with the most current information available.

## Community Transmission

Decisions to move from one level to another will be based on the New Hampshire COVID-19 Dashboard and guidance for K-12 schools. This will replace the SAU 24 Decision Matrix. The guidance coming from the Center for Disease Control, New Hampshire Department of Public Health, and local public health officials uses three criteria outlined in the table below to determine the impact of COVID-19 on a school. (Link: <https://www.covid19.nh.gov/dashboard/schools>)

Criteria	Level of School Impact		
	Low	Medium	High
Transmission within the school facility	Zero or sporadic cases with no evidence of transmission within the school setting	One cluster* in the school	Two or more unrelated clusters* in the school with onset (based on source case symptom onset dates) within 14 days of each other
Student absenteeism due to illness	<15%	15-30%	>30%
Staff capacity to conduct classes and school operations <sup>†</sup>	Normal	Strained	Critical

\* A cluster is defined as 3 or more individuals confirmed with COVID-19 who are part of a related group of individuals (e.g., classroom) who had the potential to transmit infection to each other through close contact.

† This subjective assessment should factor in a school's ability to maintain adequate staff for facility operations, transportation, teaching, and administrative functions.

Using the determined community transmission and school impact levels, schools can use the table below to identify the recommended method of instruction.

		Level of Community Transmission		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Level of School Impact	Low	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person
	Medium	In-Person	Hybrid	Hybrid <sup>†</sup>
	High	Hybrid*	Remote	Remote

\* Depending on the level of COVID-19 transmission within the school facility and outbreak status, public health may recommend temporary closure of school and remote learning for a short period of time to control transmission before re-opening in a hybrid instructional model.

† For limited COVID-19 transmission within the school facility (e.g., contained cluster in a classroom), the school can choose to move selected classrooms or sections of the school to temporary remote learning while maintaining other normal school operations.

## Mitigation Strategies

SAU 24 has a duty to provide for the health and sanitation of its schools (see NH RSA 194:3, VIII). This duty includes “the daily administration and provision of educational services to students at the school facility including . . . staff, student and parent safety. . . .” (see RSA 194-C:4, II(j)).

Should the level of COVID impact increase at any point in the year, SAU 24 schools will implement a variety of mitigation strategies aimed at keeping people safe. While the following routines address mainly students and staff members, these requirements apply equally to anyone needing to enter a school building.

The mitigation strategies may be implemented in response to:

- Student/staff positive COVID-19 test and exposure
- Inability to staff a group due to COVID-19 impacts
- State-ordered closure

## Schedules

SAU 24 schools demonstrated a commitment to keep students in-person as much as possible. We continue that commitment going forward. If, however, the impact of COVID-19 increases, shifts to remote learning and/or a hybrid schedule may be necessary to support physical distancing and limit transmission.

## Cleaning Protocols

Each school will create a schedule for cleaning and disinfecting, employing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and state guidelines. All cleaning and disinfecting supplies will meet the approved EPA List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2. Teachers will have access to safe and appropriate supplies for use in their classrooms to clean surfaces as necessary. Playgrounds and athletic fields will be included as appropriate .

All cleaning activities scheduled during a typical school year will be conducted, which involves daily, weekly and monthly tasks. The most important of these tasks is the daily removal of trash and the thorough cleaning of restrooms and nurses’ offices. These are always the priorities, even when the cleaning staff is shorthanded.

To assure the schools are safely sanitized, in addition to the normal cleaning activities, the following measures will be implemented:

- Periodic sanitizing of door handles, handrails, door bells, elevator buttons, restrooms, and other frequently touched surfaces during the school day.
- Using electrostatic sprayers, sanitize all spaces nightly after students and staff have left for the day. We will use an EPA approved disinfecting and sanitizing product, which has been proven to kill the COVID-19 virus.

## Maintenance

In addition to typical maintenance and repair activities, the following additional measures will be implemented:

- Increase the MERV rating on filters where allowable.
- Increase run time to thoroughly ventilate building each evening after staff/students have vacated AND for two hours before school commences in the morning.
- For areas of high traffic we plan to provide polycarbonate partitions. Places for these would be main offices (in front of the secretaries), library circulation desks, cafeterias, and possibly teachers' desks.
- Each morning, the head custodian will verify all air handling equipment is working properly. If some systems or components are found to be not operating, the issue will be immediately reported to the Facilities Manager.

## Hand Hygiene

All students and staff are expected to practice effective hand hygiene at the following times; arrival at school, before and after eating, after using the restroom, after coming in contact with bodily fluid, before and after handling facial coverings, after playing outdoors, and before switching locations. Before and after face covering breaks.

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If hands are not visibly dirty alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol can be used if soap and water are not readily available.

Sharing of materials will be discouraged, but when necessary, objects will be disinfected between uses. When objects are shared, hand washing or sanitizer use will be required. Schools will support the use of individual supplies such as texts, scissors, and writing

utensils as best they can. Details of proper health practices such as cough etiquette, proper mask wearing, and hand hygiene will be communicated with students, parents/guardians, and staff before the start of school.

## Mask Requirements

SAU 24 schools will continue to adhere to NH-DHHS guidance about masking recommendations. Currently, the recommendation is that masks are required in schools for unvaccinated students and staff supporting them. As the COVID-19 vaccination becomes fully available for students, we anticipate the guidance will change.

Protocols that may be instituted should the impact of COVID-19 increase in SAU 24 schools.

## Physical Distancing

A return to pre-pandemic school schedules makes it difficult to continue cohorting and physical distancing measures. We will attempt to allow physical distancing to be maintained in classrooms. Should the impact of COVID-19 necessitate, schools will take measures to create additional distance between students. Additionally, one-way traffic patterns may be identified and labeled in hallways and on stairs to maximize physical distancing. Depending on the level of transmission in the community, students may need to eat meals in their individual classrooms, a designated indoor space that allows for physical distancing, or in a designated outdoor space.

## Screenings

Should the level of COVID school impact increase to medium, all members of the community will be asked to complete a screener questionnaire that is based on the most recent COVID-19 guidance from the NH-DHHS. Parents of students should keep students home and contact their school nurse for further guidance. Nurses will communicate the screening procedures to parents/guardians.

## Transportation Procedures

In the event that the COVID status and CDC recommendations dictate, the SAU will institute COVID protocols in order to minimize the risk of community spread. Those include,

- Recommendations that family members drive students to and from school or that licensed students drive themselves.
- Consider increasing the number of bus routes in order to implement recommended guidelines for physical distancing.
- Masking and physical distancing guidelines related to waiting at bus stops, entering a bus, traveling on a bus, and exiting a bus will follow the recommendations of NH DHHS.

## Limitations to Building Use and Accessibility

If the impact of COVID-19 increases, non-essential people, including outside groups, may be restricted from entering the building. Service providers for the purpose of special education or required support services will follow the same procedures as all staff when in the building.

## Co-Curricular Activities and Athletics Limitations

Should the impact of COVID-19 increase, athletics and co-curricular activities may be modified or cancelled. Athletics will follow NHIAA and Tri-Country League guidance.

## Positive Cases of COVID-19

If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, the individual will need to stay home. Contact tracing will be done in cooperation with the NH DHHS and will follow their most updated protocols and procedures.

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## Air Quality

In the Weare and Henniker School Districts we have, like most districts, Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) equipment of varying ages and designs. All of our units are serviced four times per year through a preventative maintenance (PM)

contract with an outside contractor. Through our PM contract, if there are any issues or repairs needed for the system to operate as designed, the contractor does them at that time. Through this inspection process that occurs throughout the school year, we have systems that are operating correctly for staff and student occupancy in all district school buildings. None of the district's HVAC systems have failed any of these inspections. Additionally Henniker Elementary is in the process of a major HVAC upgrade and John Stark Regional High School is having 3 Rooftop ERVs replaced this summer.

All of our HVAC equipment utilizes a filtering system with the goal being that air inside the building is healthier for occupants than the air outside of the building, especially in relation to particulates and pollen. The filters will eliminate particulates that are in the air around us at all times which may cause respiratory issues for staff or students. Our filters are changed three times per year and the district currently uses Merv-8 filters. Merv-8 filters are the most popular filters for large commercial buildings, educational facilities, residences, industrial settings and large office spaces. These filters are excellent at controlling mold spores, hair, dust and other particulates that cause allergies. There are HVAC filters that filter out more particulates and even remove bacteria and virus particles in the air. However, not all systems are designed to use filters like that and in some instances HVAC systems cannot fit other types of filters at all. For example, Merv-16 (HEPA) filters are typically used in surgical or cleanroom applications. Merv-13 or Merv-14 filters are used in high performance buildings or general hospital and other medical office type settings.

The majority of the HVAC equipment serving John Stark Regional High School and Weare Middle School are Energy Recovery Ventilators ( ERV ) These units bring 100% fresh outside air into the building and exhaust 100% of the return air out of the building. Air changes then are accomplished with 100% outside air. This provides excellent indoor air quality in the facilities. All other HVAC equipment has a minimum outside air setpoint to meet designed ventilation requirements.

Center Woods Elementary School has a dedicated Fan Coil unit per classroom. These Fan coils will accept a MERV13 Air Filter. Each fan coils has a dedicated outside air duct providing 10 to 20% fresh air to each classroom. One distinct advantage to this type of HVAC system is the fact that each classroom has its own HVAC unit meaning air is not actively recirculated through multiple classrooms.

As part of the reopening process SAU 24 has contracted with ENE Systems of NH to provide HVAC system analysis. The contract had ENE evaluate our systems using the current COVID-19 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of New Hampshire guidance for reopening schools and buildings (see below). We also asked ENE to look at

our systems to see if we could possibly use a higher rated filter and to take a close look at the amount of additional outside (fresh) air that can be brought into district school buildings without compromising indoor air quality. As a test, ENE installed MERV13 Air filters in a Center Woods Elementary Fan Coil measuring air flow before and after. Since there was less than a 10% reduction in overall air flow between MERV 8 and MERV 13 air filters we have decided to move forward with MERV 13 air filters at Center Woods.

All of our outside dampers are operating accordingly for maximum designed ventilation. MERV13 air filters have been ordered for all HVAC equipment.

SAU24 HVAC operating controls have all been adjusted to provide maximum ventilation so that we are running earlier in the morning (about 2 hours earlier) and later in the day after the buildings become unoccupied (about 2 hours as well). We may adjust those times of operations as we get going in the school year so that the units come on even earlier and stay on later as the number of people in the buildings increase. Previously units were configured for energy conservation and now they are being adjusted for increased air flow. This will cause energy usage to increase and will affect that area of the budget.

For more information, please see:

[NH Department of Education Indoor Air Quality Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)

## Continuity of Services: Meeting All Students' Needs

The pandemic has disrupted learning for all students and impacted the social emotional health of our students and staff. The disruptions have led to challenges that will need to be addressed, as well as opportunities that we want to carry over to the post-pandemic learning environment. Across SAU 24 we have focused on essential competencies and leveraging the 1:1 technology now available. Providing interventions and additional support and specialized instruction to students has been challenging throughout the pandemic due to staffing shortages and covid safety protocols. In response to these challenges and opportunities, SAU24 is developing a roadmap to address the learning needs of all students.

### **Creating Safe and Healthy Learning Environments**

**Meeting Basic Needs:** During the 2020-2021 school year, schools across SAU24 provided free lunch to all students, including students learning remotely.

**Meeting the Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Needs of Students:** prior to the pandemic schools were seeing an increasing need for social emotional and mental health needs of our students. Through the pandemic those needs have been amplified in many of our students. Students in SAU24 have access to School Counselors, Social Workers, and School Psychologists through a tiered response to need. SAU24 plans to respond to this need in three ways, increasing professional development opportunities for staff, strengthening our core SEL curriculum, and expanding our Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to include academic and behavioral support.

### **Addressing Lost Instructional Time**

**Accelerating Learning:** SAU24 has been closely monitoring the learning of all students prior to and through the pandemic. Universal screening and diagnostic testing for students in K-8 is completed using iReady, and at the high school all students take the PSAT and SAT in grades 9-11. Through instructional approaches such as Universal Design for Learning, 1:1 and small group tutoring, and expanded learning time, SAU24 will strive to meet the needs of all students.

**Supporting Equitable Access and Effective Use of Technology:** all students in SAU24 in K-12 are issued a Google Chromebook. During the pandemic, when the need for remote learning arose, Chromebooks were sent home with students and teachers were able to

provide live, synchronous instruction. As we transition out of the pandemic, SAU24 will use these devices to fully develop a blended learning environment. Additionally, technology will allow us to personalize instruction for students and accelerate learning in response to academic loss and enrichment.

**Using Data to Target Resources and Support:** prior to the pandemic SAU24 used the Response to Intervention model to address the needs of students needing academic support. Efforts to expand our support to a full Multi Tiered System of Supports that includes academic and behavioral support were starting prior to the pandemic but stalled due to staffing shortages. As we transition out of the pandemic, resources will be targeted to continue this work and develop a fully articulated Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to include academic and behavioral support.

**Addressing Resource Inequities:** SAU24 serves a wide range of students and families with varying access to resources. Responding to the needs of our student population is a primary goal. Many of our families have experienced financial hardship during the pandemic, as a result we will continue to offer free lunch to all students during the 2021-2022 school year. In addition, when individual student materials are required, SAU24 will provide them at no cost to the student's family. We also have plans to support students who may not have adequate access to the internet, see below for more details.

### **Supporting Educator and Staff Stability and Well-Being**

**Stabilizing a Diverse and Qualified Educator Workforce:** SAU24 struggled to fully staff our schools during the pandemic, from custodial staff to educators in specialized areas, we had positions go unfilled during the 2020-2021 school year. At the time of this report, hiring for open positions has indicated that there is still a shortage of staff, however, positions have been filled for next year with high quality candidates despite losing some finalists to other districts. It has become apparent that the salary structure in some of the districts is making us less competitive with neighboring districts. SAU24 is planning to create short term positions with the goal of accelerating learning in response to the pandemic while also addressing the need to reduce turnover in our long term positions.

**Supporting Educator and Staff Well-Being:** The pandemic has created a significant increase in stress for educators and administrators. During the pandemic SAU24 supported educators through professional development, covid protocols designed to increase safety, and additional sick days to use in response to Covid. As we transition

out of the pandemic, the stressors related to personal safety will decrease, however the stressors related to meeting the social emotional and mental health needs of students and responding so learning loss will remain. SAU24 is committed to meeting the needs of educators and staff through providing targeted professional development, increasing short term instructional positions, and leveraging resources to target specific needs. SAU24 has engaged in regular surveying of students, staff, and families to determine needs, plan, and evaluate decisions and will continue to do so as we respond to covid.

### **Special Education and Students with Disabilities**

We will continue to put forth our best efforts to support all children PreK-12, including those with disabilities, during reopening. We will continue to follow our approach to adapt, plan, innovate, and partner along with families to meet the unique needs of their children. Through ongoing planning and implementation, the District, schools and staff will work to support individualized educational needs as well as ensure access to an appropriate education.

## **Technology and Connectivity**

### **Student Devices**

Elementary students will each be assigned a device. Devices will remain at school during in-person learning and be sent home with the student if it becomes necessary to transition to remote learning.

Middle and high school students will continue to be issued a device as part of the 1:1 Chromebook initiative. Students at these levels will be expected to bring their device to and from home daily.

### **Internet Access**

Should the need arise, the District will work with local cellular vendors to procure cellular hotspots. The hotspots can use a cellular signal to create a WiFi network to which laptops, Chromebooks, and other devices can connect. These devices will be made available to families who have inadequate Internet access at home to support remote learning.



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