Dear Cincinnatus Central School District:

August 25, 2021

Dear Cincinnatus Community:

Our primary goal is to stay open for in-person instruction, for all students and staff, for the entire 2021 - 2022 school year. Using last year as a model, we are confident that we can navigate our third school year dealing with COVID safely and effectively. Cooperation from students, staff, and our community is essential to make this goal a reality.

- School districts have been advised to follow The Center for Disease Control Guidance as well as The New York State Department of Health. While we await official DOH guidance, the CDC Guidance can be referenced here. Per Governor Hochul, school districts are expecting specific guidance in the coming days.
- We have three (3) ways to mitigate the spread of COVID in our school buildings -
  - Get vaccinated
  - Social distance
  - Wear a mask
- Based on CDC’s current guidance as well as Governor Hochul’s announcement on August 24, it is necessary that we will require that all staff, students, and visitors wear masks on buses and inside school buildings. We recognize that wearing masks is an important topic for parents and guardians as we prepare for the school year. We have heard concerns from community members on both sides of the issue. It remains uncertain as to what the state may require or what local officials may suggest on the issue. What we do know is that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that everyone older than 2 years old wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. We will continue to reevaluate this topic as we approach the first day of school and await guidance from the NYSDOH, however, at this time it is necessary that all students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, will be required to wear masks inside our school buildings and on our school buses.
- It is our intent to separate each student desk by three (3) feet within each of our classrooms and continue to practice excellent respiratory hygiene throughout our school day.
- At this time, we are not having students complete a daily health survey when entering the building. Instead we will send a letter home (Appendix B) containing this information and parents should still keep their children home if they demonstrate any of the COVID symptoms. You can also visit the website to see this information. We will continue to screen visitors as they enter the building.

Sincerely,

Todd M. Freeman
**Superintendent’s Written Directive**

All people who enter school property, which also includes school vehicles or attend school sponsored events are directed and required to follow the Cincinnatus Central School District’s Reopening Plan and written protocols. The Plan and written protocols can be found at cc.cnyric.org. This includes, but is not limited to, any requirements to wear face masks, wash hands, or maintain social distancing. At this time we will not use temperature checks or ask visitors to answer screening questionnaires. Failure to follow the Plan or protocols, as well as failure to follow the directive of an appropriate school official relating to following the Plan or protocols, may result in a person being refused entrance, or an administrator directing the person to leave the school property or event. It may also result in further consequences as follows:

- for all people, the District may contact law enforcement for trespass where the person refuses to leave school property as directed, as well as for any other violations committed;
- for students, discipline pursuant to the District’s Code of Conduct for insubordination, endangering the health, safety, or welfare of others, as well as other applicable violations of the Code of Conduct;
- for parents and other visitors, ban on attending school events as well as consequences pursuant to the Visitor’s Code of Conduct;
- for school personnel formal discipline, up to and including termination.

**COVID 19 Prevention Strategies Most Important for Safe In-Person Learning in K-12 Schools**

1. **Promoting Vaccination**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, “vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic.” The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages all eligible individuals to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Cincinnatus CSD encourages all staff members and eligible students to discuss the COVID-19 vaccines with their primary care provider and consider getting vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available for eligible individuals ages 12 and up. For information on how to obtain a COVID vaccine, you can visit - [http://www.cortland-co.org/432/Health-Department](http://www.cortland-co.org/432/Health-Department)

Vaccines can be obtained at NYS vaccination locations, county locations, or retail pharmacies.

Last school year, Cincinnatus CSD hosted two vaccine clinics for students, staff members and families. Employees are eligible for up to four hours of release time for each dose of the COVID vaccine. We will continue to work with our partners at the Cortland Health Department or private pharmacies to schedule vaccine clinics when students younger than 12 are deemed eligible for the vaccine.
To learn more about vaccination, visit vaccines.gov.

While the Cincinnatus Central School District is not currently requiring vaccination for school staff, we will continue to work with our employees and collective bargaining units to encourage vaccination.

2. Consistent and Correct Mask Use

Currently the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that teachers, staff, and students consistently and correctly wear a mask when indoors. The CDC recommends indoor masking for all individuals aged 2 years and older, including students, teachers, staff, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. On August 24, Governor Hochul stated, “I am also immediately directing the Department of Health to institute universal masking for anyone entering our schools.”

In outdoor settings, students, staff, and visitors do not need to wear a mask; however, individuals who are not fully vaccinated should consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings. The Central New York Pediatric Work Group also recommends that students and staff wear masks indoors- Appendix A.

The Cincinnatus Central School District will require all students, staff, and visitors to wear a mask when inside of school buildings or school vehicles occupied by students, except when eating or drinking. Mask breaks will be scheduled at various intervals throughout the school day. Exceptions to the indoor mask wearing policy will be considered on a case by case basis for individuals who cannot wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act or in cases where wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace safety. Individuals will not be required to wear a mask when participating in outdoor activities.

When students are riding on school vehicles, all drivers and passengers are required to wear a mask at all times.

Masks will be provided for those individuals who forget to bring a mask. Masks are available in the main office, nurses office, and on school vehicles.

The district will continue to monitor transmission rates in the surrounding community and consult with the Cortland Health Department and state officials on the mask wearing policy. We are hopeful that when conditions in the surrounding community improve, that the mask wearing policy can be revisited.

3. Physical Distancing

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that schools should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from
in-person learning. The CDC recommends physical distancing of six feet between individuals who are not fully vaccinated; however, the CDC also denotes several studies from the 2020-2021 school year that show low COVID-19 transmission levels in schools when other mitigation measures are in place, such as the use of masks - [click here].

In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.

Cincinnatus Central School District will encourage students to maintain a minimum distance of at least three feet during classroom activities. Given the number of students returning for in-person instruction, physical distancing is not attainable in school cafeterias or on school vehicles. During meal periods, students will be allowed to remove their mask when eating or drinking. Once a student has finished eating or drinking, students will be asked to resume wearing a face mask.

The district will increase other mitigation measures when physical distancing cannot be attained, such as improving fresh air flow by opening windows and cohorting elementary age students who are not currently eligible for the vaccine.

4. Symptomatic Testing

As of August 25, we are working with other Cortland County schools as well as OCM BOCES and the Cortland Health Department and may provide symptomatic testing of our students in our Health Office. Permission from parents and guardians will need to be obtained prior to any testing procedures.

In August 2021, Cortland County was identified as an area with a ‘high’ level of community transmission.

5. Ventilation

The Centers for Disease Control notes that improving ventilation is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy that can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. The CDC encourages improving ventilation by bringing fresh outdoor air into the building by opening windows, making changes to the HVAC or filtration systems.

Custodial and maintenance staff will perform monthly inspections of HVAC systems and change air filters on a quarterly basis with the highest grade MERV filter that does not reduce air flow to the unit. Most classroom unit ventilators can accommodate a MERV 8 or 9A HEPA filter.
6. **Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

Classroom teachers will emphasize the importance of proper handwashing and respiratory etiquette. The CDC notes that schools should monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate hand washing supplies. Custodians will monitor bathroom and classroom sinks to make sure that faucets are functioning correctly and are regularly cleaned and sanitized. Students will be reminded to wash their hands regularly especially before or after meal periods or after using the restroom. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer stations are available at various locations throughout the school and in classrooms.

7. **Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested**

In accordance with CDC guidance, students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness (influenza or COVID-19), should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for evaluation care and testing. Individuals who are absent from school will need to provide either a medical note or proof of a negative COVID test (PCR test).

Students or staff members who develop symptoms during the school day will be sent home immediately. Parents of students will be contacted immediately to come and pick up their child.

The district will send out reminders on a routine basis on the importance of staying home when sick and on the symptoms of COVID 19 which include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

The district will not be asking students and staff to fill out a daily health questionnaire and the district will not be taking student temperatures when students arrive at school. The district dedicated considerable resources to symptom screening and temperature taking during the 2020-2021 school year with little benefit. The CDC also noted the limited effectiveness in symptom screening and “does not currently recommend routine (such as daily) school-based COVID-19 symptom screening of all students.” It should be noted that students should not attend school when they are sick.
8. Contact Tracing in Combination with Isolation and Quarantine

The district will continue to work with Cortland County and NYS Department of Health representatives to complete all contact tracing and assist with notifying individuals who should monitor symptoms, isolate, or quarantine based on guidance from the local health department. The most recent guidelines on contact tracing and quarantine/isolation is dated February 16, 2021 and the district will continue to seek updated guidance from the local health department - click here. If students and vaccinated staff are correctly and consistently wearing masks, quarantining will not be necessary.

The district will report new diagnoses of COVID-19 to the local health department and submit associated contact tracing data upon request. It should be noted that any formal notice of quarantine is the responsibility of the local health department. The district will also contact families of students when exposures occur that may require symptom monitoring, quarantine or isolation.

9. Cleaning and Disinfection

According to the Centers for Disease Control, daily cleaning and disinfection is usually sufficient to remove viral particles and germs from surfaces. The district will follow standard practices and procedures for school cleaning, which include a cleaning of classrooms and disinfecting high contact surfaces each evening after school hours.

Additional Considerations

Student Attendance
School principals and the nurse will continue to monitor student attendance. Schools will encourage regular on-time attendance and identify strategies and supports to assist students who are struggling with school attendance.

Social/Emotional/Mental Health Needs

Cincinnatus CSD will continue to keep in touch with students, caregivers and parents regarding social, emotional, and mental health needs. The district is going to utilize the Behavior Intervention and Monitoring Assessment Tool in certain grades to identify both group and individual needs. The emotional impact on students during the pandemic has been significant. The district is using federal grant funds to secure additional staff to help address the social, emotional, and mental health needs of our students.

Disabilities or Other Health Care Needs

Cincinnatus CSD is committed to the safety of all students and staff. The district will provide accommodations, modifications, and assistance when implementing COVID-19 safety protocols.
This may mean that approaches, strategies, and safety precautions may need to be adjusted for individual students or staff members based on their specific needs.

Given the focus on returning all students to the classroom, Cincinnatus teachers will not be live streaming lessons to students learning from home. While this service of live streaming lessons was available during the previous school year, it was noted that some students excelled while learning from home but most remote students were not successful.

**Visitors**

The district will continue to review and reevaluate visitor access during the pandemic. Last school year, we were successful in welcoming parents and spectators back for outdoor athletic events and smaller audiences for indoor events, such as concerts. As scheduled events approach, we will communicate important safety information to invited parents/caregivers and spectators.

We will work with the local health department to develop protocols to welcome a limited number of spectators for indoor sporting events. The district will work with Section III and our league to determine appropriate safety protocols for welcoming spectators at indoor sporting events. For outdoor sporting events, students, staff, families, and community members are welcome to attend.

Families driving their children to school or picking up their children during afternoon dismissal are asked to use the following procedures:

**Arrival**
- Parent Drop Off or Walkers -
  - Students in UPK - 4 will enter at the Visitor’s Center Entrance area (Door #1 or the Handicapped Access door)
  - Students in grades 5 - 12 will enter the building near the flagpole in the front of the building. The door is labeled as Door #25.
  - The youngest learners (UPK & K) will be supported by caring staff members who will walk them to their classrooms.
- Arrival by Bus - Students in UPK - 6 will enter at the Grade 3 wing. Students in grades 7 - 12 will enter through the Senior Lounge area.

**Dismissal**
- We will use the same practice as last year.
- Will begin at 2:50 pm
- General Walkers will leave via the Visitor's Center Area
- Parent Pick-Up will be at the Auditorium Entrance
- Students riding the buses will load as they did last year
- Please provide written communication for transportation changes
Mrs. Symons posted the reminder of our arrival and dismissal procedures in her most recent letter in the Lion’s Roar. click here for the full letter.

For all school visitors, please be sure to stay home when you are sick and seek medical care, regardless of vaccination status.

**Emergency Closures**

The district will announce on major television stations and local media when schools are closed due to inclement weather, loss of utilities or other unforeseen circumstances. The district will continue to observe traditional “snow days” so long as the district does not exhaust the allotted emergency closing days built into the school calendar. This means that all schools will be closed and no transportation services will be provided during emergency closing days.

In the event that schools are closed by local, state or officials due to a spread of disease or lack of available staffing resources, schools may have to shift to remote learning. Classroom teachers should be prepared to switch to remote learning quickly. In the event that schools are closed for in person learning, students will be expected to login from home and follow their normal school schedule via video conferencing tools and online learning platforms provided by the district.

**Food Service and School Meals**

Cincinnatus CSD students will receive meals at no cost throughout the school as we are enrolled in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Regarding meal preparation, staff should wear a mask during meal preparation and service. Students should wear masks when moving through the food service line and cafeteria.

According to the CDC, “students should not be excluded from in person learning to keep a minimum distance, including meal times.” Given the number of students returning to school for in person instruction, physical distancing during meal periods is limited to the size of our cafeteria. When possible, based on weather conditions and available staff for supervision, schools will allow students to eat outside.

School cafeterias and kitchens will be cleaned and disinfected daily. Schools will promote hand washing before and after eating, after handling garbage, or after using the restroom.

**Remote Learning**

Given the focus on returning as many students as possible to the classroom, Cincinnatus teachers will not be live streaming lessons to students learning from home. While this service of
live streaming lessons was available during the previous school year, it was noted that some students excelled while learning from home but most remote students were not successful.

In the event that schools are closed by local, state or officials due to a spread of disease or lack of available staffing resources, schools may have to shift to remote learning. Classroom teachers should be prepared to switch to remote learning quickly. In the event that schools are closed for in person learning, students will be expected to login from home and follow their normal school schedule via video conferencing tools and online learning platforms provided by the district.

**Transportation**

Cincinnatus CSD will continue to encourage families to transport their children to and from school. For students riding school vehicles, students and drivers will wear a mask at all times when students are on board. The district will attempt to seat students by household and clean and disinfect vehicles at the end of each school day. When weather conditions allow, drivers will attempt to increase airflow on school vehicles by opening windows and roof hatches.

**Recess and Physical Education**

According to the Centers for Disease Control, “people do not need to wear masks when outdoors” for activities such as recess and physical education. Physical education teachers will attempt to maximize outdoor spaces and activities during physical education classes. Parents and caregivers should be sure to dress students appropriately, even during the winter months, for outdoor activities during physical education classes and recess.

During indoor physical education activities, the CDC recommends that masks be worn indoors.

**Sports and Other Extracurricular Activities**

Cincinnatus CSD will work with Section III and the Central Counties League (CCL) to develop protocols for safe participation in athletics programs for students. According to the CDC, certain high risk sports remain at increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 due to increased risk for getting and spreading COVID-19. Close contact sports and indoor sports are considered high risk.

For indoor sports, the district may increase physical distancing between players on the bench or spectators in the crowd. The district may also reduce capacity for spectators or not allow spectators at indoor sports based on determinations made by state or local authorities.

**Supports for School Staff Members**

Cincinnatus CSD recognizes the challenges that our school employees face in dealing with the stress of day to day school activities coupled with the additional safety precautions during the
pandemic. We are incredibly grateful and proud of the work of our dedicated staff members. Employees who are dealing with personal or family issues can access our Employee Assistance Program by calling 315-471-1361 or 1-800-327-8764, emailing eap@ocmboces.org or visiting the program website - https://www.ocmboces.org/eap

**Emergency Operations Plans**

Cincinnatus CSD revised the District Emergency Response plan to include an appendix related to Pandemic Preparedness. A copy of the final emergency response plan is available on the district website.

**Vaccination Verification**

The district will work with state and local vaccine providers to encourage vaccination efforts with school employees and students. The district will rely on the local and state health department to determine the vaccination status of individuals who may be considered close contacts of a positive case. Staff members or students who share their vaccination status with the school can be assured that the district will keep this information confidential and secure.
To: Central New York School Superintendents

In a few weeks, children all over Central New York will return to school. As pediatricians, infectious disease physicians, and public health experts from Upstate Medical University and the community, our goal is to ensure that all children can safely return to school in person, full time, and participate in after school activities and sports. We advocate to minimize the risk for COVID-19 infection and exposure at school which requires lengthy isolation or quarantine, respectively. A safe in-person school attendance is predicated on a **universal masking policy for all children and staff**. Our recommendations are based on the best medical advice and scientific research available.

*What We know:*

Delta is the predominant SARS-CoV-2 variant. Delta is **more transmissible** and possibly causes more serious disease compared to the original virus and its new variants. Data indicate that the Delta variant is 40 to 60 percent more transmissible than Alpha and almost twice as transmissible as the original SARS-CoV-2 virus. As an example, Delta variant is more contagious than other viruses like Ebola, common cold, flu, and smallpox.

Delta led to a surge in hospitalization and death among unvaccinated. Currently, more than 97 percent of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units or patients dying from COVID-19 are infected with the Delta variant. To make things worse, younger adults and now children are being hospitalized in greater numbers. Many children are not eligible for vaccination given their age. They are particularly susceptible to infection unless they are protected by mask. In addition, control and prevention protocol are important: hand washing, not attending school when sick, keeping physical distance, and staying in well ventilated areas whenever possible.

The Delta variant puts **everyone at increased risk**. Those who have been vaccinated are still protected against moderate and serious illness and death. However, protection is not 100 percent. **Vaccinated people can still get infected and be contagious to others**, particularly if they are unmasked and in poorly ventilated and crowded settings. **Unvaccinated people are at risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and death.** They also remain the main driver of COVID-19 in
the communities around them. Vaccination with COVID vaccine is the best way to prevent serious COVID-19 and stop the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, children under the age of 12 years are not eligible for vaccination, making universal masking crucial to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

What we recommend to stay safe:

**Masking is a proven way to keep children safe from COVID-19,** especially when children are indoors at school. There is abundant evidence that shows masking protects children and adults from COVID-19, including the Delta variant. It is recommended by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Public Health Association, as well as most respected medical organizations.

We all are part of this community and we care deeply about the health of our neighbors, our patients, and all children. We recognize the importance of in person education and social interactions for children. Safe return to school must be coupled with universal masking to avoid school closures, and exclusion of exposed or infected children. The cost of COVID-19 infection and stress associated with testing of children cannot be underestimated, and should be carefully considered as schools are finalizing their masking policies. **Masked children are less likely to be exposed, and less likely to require testing.** They are also less likely to be infected, and require isolation and exclusion from school. Our unequivocal recommendation is for every school district to institute universal mask wearing requirement for children and staff. Masking in schools will help keep our children and our community safe.

**Kathryn Anderson, MD, PhD,** Assistant Professor of Medicine, Hospitalist/Epidemiologist, Upstate Medical University  
**Winter Berry, DO,** Associate Professor General Pediatrics Upstate Medical University; President, American Academy of Pediatrics New York Chapter 1  
**Steven Blatt, MD,** Professor of Pediatrics, General Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University; Co-President, Pediatric Society of Central New York  
**Gregory Conners, MD MPH MBA,** Chair, Department of Pediatrics, & Executive Director, Golisano Children’s Hospital, Upstate Medical University  
**Barbara Anne Morisseau, MD,** Brighton Hill Pediatrics; Co-President, Pediatric Society of Central New York  
**Christopher Morley PhD,** Professor & Chair, Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University  
**Jana Shaw, MD, MPH,** Professor, Pediatric Infectious Disease, Golisano Children’s Hospital Epidemiologist, Upstate Medical University  
**Telisa Stewart, DrPH,** Associate Professor, Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University
In accordance with CDC guidance, students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness (influenza or COVID-19), should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for evaluation care and testing. Individuals who are absent from school will need to provide either a medical note or proof of a negative COVID test (PCR test).

Students or staff members who develop symptoms during the school day will be sent home immediately. Parents of students will be contacted immediately to come and pick up their child.

The district will send out reminders on a routine basis on the importance of staying home when sick and on the symptoms of COVID 19 which include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Date of return will be determined on an individual basis in coordination with the School Nurse based on guidelines from the Cortland Health Department and/or New York State Department of Health.
Hochul: Health Dept. will mandate masks in schools

Copied from On Board from New York State School Boards Association: August 18, 2019

By Eric D. Randall
Editor-in-Chief

In "a matter of days" after Kathy Hochul becomes governor, she expects the state Department of Health (DOH) to require that everyone in public school wear masks.

"I believe that we'll need mask mandates for children to go back to school. And that will have to be universal. It will be statewide," Lt. Gov. Hochul told reporters in a school cafeteria in Corona, Queens.

Hochul said that while the governor does not have the authority to issue such a requirement, DOH does.

"In a matter of days I'll be able to say, 'We will have mask mandates.' I just don't have that authority at this time," she said, according to a report by reporter Erin Durkin of Politico.

In prior statements, Hochul has said she was in favor of universal masking in schools but did not lay out a plan for how the state government could issue such a requirement.

"There is a tremendous amount of anxiety among parents, teachers, administrators, who thought what we went through last year would be it, that there would be closure, that by the time the school year started in 2021 we'd be in a different place," Hochul said, according to WABC-TV in New York City. "We thought we were there a few months ago, the Delta variant has changed the dynamic considerably, so we have to continue being vigilant. But, number one, our children need to be back in schools," Hochul said.

Hochul has also spoken out in favor of a vaccination requirement for school employees.

Speaking on CNN's "State of the Union" program on Sunday, Hochul said she would ask legislative leaders to grant her the authority to require school employees to be vaccinated before returning to the workplace. "I'm willing to speak to our legislative leaders and to take whatever action I need to [do] to protect people," she said, according to Reuters.