

New Castle Christian Academy

Response to COVID19

Re-opening Health and Safety Plan

Introduction

New Castle Christian Academy's Health and Safety Plan for re-opening during the COVID19 Pandemic sets forth the rules under which the school will operate during the instructional year. The plan is designed in accordance with the Center for Disease Control's Interim Guidance for Schools and Day Camps, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Preliminary Guidance for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools. The final document also relied heavily upon the American Academy of Pediatrics' COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry publication. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics,

Policies should be practical, feasible, and appropriate for child and adolescent's developmental stage.

The AAP quote summarizes the starting point and goal of the NCCA Health and Safety Plan.

Pennsylvania's Phased Reopening Process and the Learning Process

According to Governor Wolf's Process to Reopen Pennsylvania, counties are designated a color (Red, Yellow, Green) indicating the level of threat and required steps to be taken by schools.

Red Phase – If Lawrence County is designated as a Phase Red county, New Castle Christian Academy will remain closed for in-person instruction. All instruction will be provided via remote learning, with a combination of digital and non-digital instruction.

Yellow Phase – If Lawrence County is designated as a Phase Yellow county, New Castle Christian Academy WILL provide in-person instruction. Instruction will adhere to the general plan, and specific Yellow procedures listed below.

Green Phase – If Lawrence County is designated as a Phase Green county, New Castle Christian Academy WILL provide in-person instruction. Instruction will adhere to the general plan, and specific Green procedures listed below.

Pandemic Coordinator and team

New Castle Christian Academy has established a Pandemic Team who is responsible for the development of the re-opening plan, modifications to the plan, and the oversight of the implementation of the plan.

Gary Heutzler – Coordinator: Responsible for plan development and implementation; staff compliance; parent and student compliance; reporting of plan effectiveness to the team.
Jessica Beveridge – NCCA School Nurse: Responsible for assessment of student and staff wellness; oversight of student/staff isolation and quarantine; determination of student/staff clearance to return to school.

Carley Pickel – Faculty Liaison: Responsible for communicating the effectiveness of classroom plans and procedures between staff and the Principal.

Cody Simmons – Parent Representative: Responsible for oversight of cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing procedures.

Dr. Therese Linnon (Pediatrician), Dr. Ramesh Kaul (Lung Specialist) – Medical Consultants: Provide guidance and input for instructional plans regarding student health and safety.

Monitoring students and staff for symptoms and exposure

All faculty, staff, administration and students will have their temperature taken before entering the school building. Visitors and other persons entering the school will also have to have their temperature taken. Temperatures will be taken with a forehead scanning thermometer. Any person with a fever over 100 will not be allowed to enter the building.

Students arriving in car will be checked before their car is allowed to leave. If the student has a fever, they must return to their car and be taken home.

If a bus student is dropped off with a fever, they will be taken to the quarantine room and must be picked up by a parent or guardian immediately.

Student and faculty temperatures will be taken twice daily: once before entering the school and once at lunch.

Limitation of school visitors and volunteers

Due to COVID19, New Castle Christian Academy will restrict volunteers to those vital for the functioning of school. School visitors are restricted to the foyer, school office, faculty restroom and nurse's office. As a general rule, visitors may not go into the classroom area. Pastors and chapel speakers are allowed to enter the gymnasium for chapel.

All visitors and volunteers must wear a mask.

Hygiene Practices for students and staff

All classrooms, the teacher's room and the cafeteria will be equipped with hand sanitizing stations. Staff and students are to sanitize their hands when entering a classroom, the teacher's room, cafeteria, nurse's office or the main office.

Cohort Approach to Learning

A cohort is a group of students that will learn together throughout the school day. At NCCA, students are in natural cohort groups – there is very little mixing of classes. In an effort to reduce the number of teacher and student contacts each student encounters in a day, the cohort approach will be expanded to include lunch, recess and morning meetings. Students will spend the majority of their day with their cohort (their classmates) in the classroom. NCCA Middle School students are considered as one cohort of 20 children, and can therefore participate in specials, lunch, study hall and recess together.

Utilizing Campus Grounds

As per the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation, teachers are encouraged to take their students outside for instruction or other class activities when weather is mild. Teachers may use tables under the school pavilion or choose a grassy area for learning purposes.

Social Distancing

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers the following information/guidelines on the effectiveness of social distancing among students:

There is a conflict between optimal academic and social/emotional learning in schools and strict adherence to current physical distancing guidelines. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools "space seating/desks at least 6 feet apart when feasible." In many school settings, 6 feet between students is not feasible without limiting the number of students. Evidence suggests that spacing as close as 3 feet may approach the benefits of 6 feet of space, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic. Schools should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a 6-foot spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative.

In Pre-K, the relative impact of physical distancing among children is likely small based on current evidence and certainly difficult to implement. Therefore, Pre-K should focus on more effective risk mitigation strategies for this population... Reducing classmate interactions/play in Pre-K aged children may not provide substantial COVID-19 risk reduction. Similarly, [for elementary education], reducing classmate interactions/play in elementary school-aged children may not provide enough COVID-19 risk reduction to justify potential harms.

"Desks should be placed 3 to 6 feet apart when feasible (if this reduces the amount of time children are present in school, harm may outweigh potential benefits)."

1. Classroom Social Distancing – Early Education

Play and student interactions: Students will be allowed to play together. Students may be assigned a "station" for play/learning during station time. If assigned, they should not "roam" between stations. Face shields or masks are required.

Desk work: Students will be seated at tables for desk work. Face shields or masks are required if students are closer than 6 feet apart.

2. Classroom Social Distancing – Elementary School

Student interactions: Students will be allowed to work together and in small groups. Groupings will be determined as the teacher sees fit. Face shields or masks are required.

Desk work: Student desks will be spaced at least 3 feet apart (see AAP guidelines above). If this is not possible (classes with large populations), student desks will be paired in groups of 2: students will face the same direction, and a clear plexi shield divider will be placed between the desk pairs. Face shields or masks are required if students are closer than 6 feet apart.

Yellow Phase – NCCA will follow CDC and PA Department of Health guidelines for face shields or masks under the increased risk conditions. *(Updated 7/24/20)*

Classroom Social Distancing – Middle School (grades 5 to 8)

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "There is likely a greater impact of physical distancing on risk reduction of COVID in secondary schools than early childhood or elementary education."

Therefore, social distancing requirements for Middle School students will be more rigid.

Student interactions: Students will be allowed to work together and in small groups. However, students will be required to use masks when working in close proximity to each other. The AAP recommends:

Universal face coverings in middle and high schools when not able to maintain a 6-foot distance (students and adults).

Desk work: Student desks will be spaced 6 feet apart when possible. Clear plexi shield dividers may be placed on all student desks. Face shields or masks are required if students are closer than 6 feet apart.

Yellow Phase – NCCA will follow CDC and PA Department of Health guidelines for face shields or masks under the increased risk conditions. *(Updated 7/24/20)*

3. Teacher-Student Social Distancing

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics:

Given what is known about transmission dynamics, adults and adult staff within schools should attempt to maintain a distance of 6 feet from other persons as much as possible, particularly around other adult staff.

Teachers should maintain 6 feet from students when possible and if not disruptive to educational process.

Maintaining this distance is particularly difficult with Early Education and Elementary classes. If teachers can maintain the 6-foot social distancing standard, then masks or face shields are optional. Teachers working in closer proximity to staff or students are required to wear a mask or face shield. Teachers may also use a teacher-student worktable in the classroom. This table may have a plexi shield partition between the teacher and student.

4. Staff-Staff Social Distancing

Faculty and Staff should “*attempt to maintain a distance of 6 feet from other persons as much as possible, particularly around other adult staff.*” (AAP)

Staff should wear a mask or face shield when interacting with other staff at a distance less than 6 feet.

5. Hallway Social Distancing

Students will walk in a line (not a “herd”) when moving in the hallway. Students will stay all the way to the right of the hall when walking. Each student should allow for a REASONABLE buffer space between other students (EE and Elementary teachers will work to teach students what a reasonable space is).

Middle School students may move freely through the 2nd floor hallways while wearing masks. Student lockers will be grouped close to the students’ homeroom. Middle school students will walk in a line and staying to the right side when walking in the elementary, pre-k and office hallways.

Face Coverings

On July 1, 2020, the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced an Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings.

On July 6, the Pennsylvania Department of Education made clear the DOH mandate applies to all children in all schools with few exceptions. Their website states:

This Order applies to all individuals while in school entities, including public K-12 schools... private and parochial schools... and locally funded prekindergarten activities.

For the safety of students, staff and families, and to avoid community spread of COVID-19, students and staff are considered to be members of the public who are congregating in indoor locations. As such, they are required to adhere to this Order.

Requirements of a face covering. According to the PDE:

The Order requires individuals to wear a "face covering." "Face covering" means a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face. A "face covering" can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk, or linen, and, for the purposes of the order, can include a plastic face shield that covers the nose and mouth. "Face coverings" may be factory-made, sewn by hand, or improvised from household items.

Removal of face coverings. According to the PDE:

Schools may allow students to remove their face coverings when students are:

- 1. Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart;*
- 2. Seated at desks or assigned work spaces at least 6 feet apart; or*
- 3. Engaged in any activity at least 6 feet apart (e.g. face covering breaks, recess, etc.).*

Face covering exemptions. According to the PDE:

Any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield...

Per the Order, [parents or] students are not required to show documentation that an exception applies.

If a child qualifies for one of the exemptions listed above, and they wish to opt their child out of wearing a mask, the parents/guardians must submit a signed letter stating their child falls under the allowed exemptions and stating they elect to have their child attend school without wearing a mask.

Staff: Staff must wear masks or face shields when working in close proximity to students (within the 6-foot standard). Staff should also wear facemasks while working with other adults if they are unable to maintain the 6-foot social distancing standard.

Yellow Phase – Masks or face shields will be required even if the 6-foot social distancing standard can be maintained.

Upper Elementary and Middle School Students: Upper elementary and middle school students must wear masks if working in close proximity to other students (not maintaining 6-foot social distancing standard). If sitting at their desk and maintaining social distancing, students do not need to wear masks.

Yellow Phase – Masks will be required even if the 6-foot social distancing standard can be maintained.

Lower Elementary and Early Education Students: As of writing of this document, the PA Department of Education has given clearance for students to either wear a mask or a face shield. If this allowance continues, New Castle Christian Academy is recommending the use of face shields for lower elementary and early education students. Masks may interfere with the educational process. However, the decision of mask or face shield is ultimately the parents' to make. Maintaining the 6-foot social distancing standard will be extremely difficult for this age group. When the 6-foot standard cannot be maintained, face shields or masks will be worn by students except when eating or using the bathroom.

Sharing of Materials

Sharing of materials in the classroom will be limited to only when absolutely necessary. Students will be required to bring their own supplies and the supplies will be kept separate from other students' supplies.

Computer sharing: EE and Elementary children may have their own keyboard cover for computer use. Middle school students will each receive a Chromebook for use in school. If funds allow, students in grades 2, 3 and 4 will also receive a Chromebook for use in school.

Recess equipment: EE and Elementary classrooms may have their own set of recess equipment (balls, jump ropes, etc.).

Gym equipment: The gym teacher may vary gym instruction within any given day so students will not be using the same equipment. If students use the same equipment, the gym teacher will disinfect the equipment between gym classes.

Specials Classes

NCCA students regularly participate in "Specials" classes (i.e. Music, Art, Gym, Spanish, Library, Computer). These classes are held in the gym, library, computer room and the multi-purpose specials room. On any given day, over 100 students use the same room. In an effort to reduce sharing of specials rooms, the following procedures will be implemented:

1. Pre-K4 classes will not participate in Spanish or Library specials. Pre-K4 gym class will be held on a day when no other gym classes are in session (Friday). The Pre-K4 cohorts will not combine for gym.
2. For grade High Fives! to 4th grade, Art, Music, Computer, Spanish and Library teachers will travel TO the student cohort's classroom.
3. Middle school students will travel in their cohort to the Spanish room and special's rooms as has been their practice.
4. Gym classes will be held outside when weather permits. When this is not possible, gym classes will be held in the gym.

Lunch and Hot Lunch

Pre-K4 to 4th grade students: Early Education and Elementary students will eat lunch in their classrooms. Students may still purchase hot lunch, drinks, and/or snacks. Lunch items purchased will be brought to the classroom by the NCCA lunch staff.

Outdoor lunch: EE and Elementary teachers may choose to take their class outside for lunch when mild weather permits. Teachers should keep their class to a confined, designated area.

Middle school students: The Middle School cohort will eat lunch in the cafeteria. Hot lunches will be served at the students' tables to those who purchased lunch. Snacks and drinks will be distributed by staff. Students will not be allowed in the kitchen.

Recess

Classes will participate in recess as a cohort group and not mix with other classes/grade levels.

Outdoor recess: Classes are encouraged to go outside for recess when weather permits. Coats will be required for colder temperatures.

Playground: Classes are allowed to use the playground. The American Academy of Pediatrics has offers the following information/guidelines regarding playground use:

Enforcing physical distancing in an outside playground is difficult and may not be the most effective method of risk mitigation. Emphasis should be placed on cohorting students and limiting the size of groups participating in playground time. Outdoor transmission of virus is known to be much lower than indoor transmission... hand hygiene should be emphasized before and after use of these spaces.

Indoor recess: On inclement weather days, classes will have indoor recess. Classes may use the gymnasium on non-gym instruction days, or they may hold recess in their classroom. Only one cohort class may use the gymnasium for recess at a time, so teachers will need to work out a use schedule for time and days.

Higher Risk Staff and Children

NCCA strongly suggests that staff and students who are designated as higher risk, wear masks regardless of whether they can maintain the 6-foot social distancing standard. NCCA also strongly suggests that masks be used instead of face shields; or that face shields and masks be combined. Higher risk children and staff should have a designated space to eat lunch that provides a further distance from others.

High risk staff who wish to work behind a plexi shield will be provided with a plexi shield on their worktable or desk.

Rest Rooms

Students should only use the restrooms assigned to their class:

- Pre-K, High Fives! and Kindergarten will use the bathrooms in their respective classrooms.
- Elementary classes will use the boy's and girl's rooms on the main floor (located at the ends of the office hallway).
- Middle school classes will use the boy's and girl's rooms on the 2nd floor and will also use the 2nd floor bathrooms for changing for gym class.

Students may not use the staff restroom on the main floor. Staff should not use the student bathrooms.

Drinking Fountains

Students are encouraged to bring 2 or more bottles of water to school each day for liquid refreshment in lieu of using the drinking fountains. Drinking fountain use is discouraged. However, fountains will remain operable and will be cleaned 2 to 3 times daily for those needing to use the drinking fountain.

In-School Quarantine

Quarantine room: A room will be designated as the quarantine room for the purpose of temporarily quarantining somebody who shows COVID19 symptoms. When the room is being used for quarantining a student or staff member, only the Nurse, Principal and parent/guardian of the student are allowed to enter the room. Anyone entering the room must be wearing PPE. After being occupied, nobody will be allowed to enter the room until the room has been cleaned, disinfected, and sanitized by custodial staff. The quarantine room will house only 1 person at a time. Other vacant rooms will be used as a temporary quarantine rooms if there is more than 1 person needing quarantine.

Observable symptoms: the primary symptoms that would result in a student/staff member being quarantined are fever above 100 degrees and/or a continual congestive cough (involving mucus) that is “not ordinary” for the person (not ordinary would encompass coughs not related to clearing of throat, asthma or allergies for example).

Student with symptoms: Students who display COVID19 symptoms in school will be brought to the quarantine room. If the student needs to use the bathroom, they will be escorted to the staff restroom – they may NOT use the boy’s or girl’s restroom. The student’s parents/guardian will be called and the student must be picked up immediately (within the half hour). This is an emergency situation and under no circumstances will the student be allowed to remain at school. If the parent/guardian cannot pick up the student right away, they MUST arrange for somebody else to pick up the student. If the symptoms are severe (dangerously high fever for example) and there is a delay in pickup, the Nurse or Principal will call 911.

1. Bus student – Although parent drop-off students can be sent home in the car they arrived in, bus students who have a fever or show COVID19 symptoms must be admitted to school and sent directly to the quarantine room pending parent/guarding pickup.
2. Student who develops symptoms at school – Students may develop a fever or display COVID19 symptoms during the school day. These students must be brought to the quarantine room.

Staff with symptoms: If a staff-member develops COVID19 symptoms, they will immediately leave the school building if they are capable of doing so. Staff-members who are too sick to drive themselves home will immediately go to the quarantine room and await transportation home.

Classes who come in direct contact with a student/staff-member who displays COVID19 symptoms: Students who were in the student’s class or who had direct contact with the staff-member in the classroom will be temporarily moved to one of the empty classrooms until their classroom can be sanitized. The classroom that was vacated may not be entered by anybody until it has been sanitized. The remaining students and teacher will not have contact with any outside student or staff-member for the remainder of the day. Parents/guardians will have to provide transportation home for their child.

Return of student or staff-member showing COVID19 symptoms

Any student or staff-member who has been sent home for showing COVID19 symptoms MUST be either:

- Cleared by a doctor for return (documentation must be presented before entering the building)
- Or, if the symptom was a fever, the student/staff member must be fever free for 72 hours

Any student or staff-member who has tested POSITIVE for COVID19 will NOT be allowed to return to school until at least a 14-day period has passed and he/she has been cleared by a doctor for return. Documentation from the doctor MUST be presented before entering the school building.

Quarantine of class-cohort groups and staff-members

The purpose of utilizing the classroom-cohort model is to eliminate interactions between classes for the purpose of limiting the spread of the virus. If a member of a class-cohort contracts the COVID19 virus, student quarantining can be localized rather than school-wide.

Class-cohort quarantine: If a member of a class-cohort contracts the COVID19 virus, the entire class-cohort (including teacher) must be quarantined at home. Students will transition to distance learning during this quarantine period.

Returning to school from class-cohort quarantine

The Department of Health will be contacted immediately by the NCCA nurse or principal upon learning of a student or faculty member who has tested positive for COVID19. The DOH will provide guidance as to the extent and duration of home isolation and the return to school. *(Updated 7/24/20)*

Communication

Communication between school, parent and the county health authority is extremely important as a means of preventing the spread of COVID19 and the safety of faculty, staff, children, parents, and loved-ones who may be part of the vulnerable population. Prompt communication to all involved when there has been an exposure to COVID19 is imperative. Communication from parents should be made immediately by way of phone call: notes and second-hand communication is not acceptable. Communication from the school will be made through the school's emergency contact system, OneCall Now. School communication will be sent through phone message, text and email.

Communication from school to families: New Castle Christian Academy will communicate potential exposures and actual virus cases to families affected. NCCA will honor HIPAA regulations regarding anonymity. Communication will be handled according to exposure potential rather than as an across-the-school communication. If a student or staff member develops symptoms at school, the families of all students coming in contact with that person will be contacted. Follow-up communication will indicate whether families need to take further precautions.

Communication from families to school: Staff members and families MUST communicate cases of potential exposure (child MIGHT have been exposed to somebody with the virus), actual exposure (child WAS exposed to somebody having the virus), a family member living with the student who has the virus, or if the NCCA student contracted the COVID19 virus. Communication from the school office to other NCCA families who had contact with the student/staff member will be carried out in a way that does not

create a sense of panic and in a way that protects the HIPAA mandated anonymity of the student/staff member.

Communication with the Department of Health: If a student or faculty member tests positive for COVID19, the NCCA school nurse or principal will contact the Lawrence County Department of Health. The DOH will provide the principal with further instructions on how to proceed. *(Updated 7/24/20)*

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Classrooms and hallways will be cleaned and sanitized daily. Bathrooms, drinking fountains, stair railings and door handles will be cleaned 3 times during the school day: more if warranted.

New Castle Christian Academy will follow cleaning and sanitizing guidelines as directed by the governing authorities (DOH, CDC, PDE)

Frequently Asked Parent Questions regarding school during the COVID19 pandemic:

1. When will school open and will we remain open? As long as we are a “green” or “yellow” county, NCCA will open on-time with classes held at school. School will close for quarantine if there is an influx of COVID19 cases among staff and/or students.
2. Will there be alternating weeks of at-school and at-home instruction? No. We are small enough that we can instruct at school and maintain social distancing according to the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines.
3. Does my child need to wear a mask? According to current state mandates and Department of Education directives, children need to wear a mask or face shield unless they are maintaining the 6-foot social distancing standard; students may be considered exempt due to a medical or neurological condition. There will be times when children are close together and will be wearing masks or face shields. There will be times when children are socially distanced and can take masks or face shields off.
4. Will my child’s teacher have to wear a mask? According to current state mandates and Department of Education directives, staff must wear either a face mask or a face shield unless they are maintaining the 6-foot social distancing standard.
5. Will my child’s class be mixing with other classes in the school? Not for early education and elementary classes. This will inhibit the spread of virus from one class to another. Early education and elementary students will not be changing classes; teachers will instead rotate into the class. For example, students will not go to the Spanish room – the Spanish teacher will come to their classroom; or Mrs. Avau will go teach in Mrs. Gudyk’s class rather than students switching classrooms. Middle school students (grades 5 to 8) are a much smaller population of the school and are considered a grouping of 20 that can interact.
6. Will the school supply my child with a mask or face shield? We will have extra masks on hand for students who misplace their masks or who soil their masks. Parents are responsible to purchase masks or face shields. Parents are encouraged to purchase masks and shields that are fashionable and fun. Parents should also purchase at least 5 masks (or 2 face shields) so children can come to school with a clean mask every day.

7. Will my child be able to play on the playground? Yes! Children are strongly encouraged to get outdoors as much as possible for both play and instruction.
8. Will my child still have Music, Art, Computer, Library, Spanish and Gym? Yes! All students from High Fives! to grade 8 will have regularly scheduled specials classes.
9. Will we have chapel? We will assemble for chapel (does not include Pre-K classes). We will sit in our class sections and will distance from other classes to the maximum possible (at least 6 feet). Another option will be to have a smaller number of classes attend chapel while the other classes are participating through “live streaming” in their classrooms.
10. What about class birthday parties? We will celebrate students’ birthdays in the classroom. Parents may bring in cupcakes or “goodies” that are professionally made (a bakery, donut shop, grocery store, etc.) or that are individually wrapped and purchased at a supermarket (individual chip bags, ice pops, ice cream cones, twinkies, etc.). Parents may not bring in home-baked items to distribute to the class.
11. Will hot lunch still be offered? Yes. Although, students in grades Pre-K4 to grade 4 will eat in their classrooms. Hot lunch will be brought to the classrooms for those who purchased lunch. A snack cart will also be brought to classrooms so students can purchase drinks or snacks.
12. Will the entire school close for quarantine if one student comes down with the virus? Not if we can help it. NCCA will immediately notify county health officials (in the event of a student/staff positive COVID19 test). These officials will help school administration determine a course of action. We anticipate a dismissal of the exposed class (only the class – not the entire school) and exposed staff member for a period of 2 days. This initial short-term dismissal will allow time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID19 situation impacting the school and for the custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. NCCA Administration will work with the local health officials to determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended dismissal duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID19.

(Updated 7/24/20)