

The Graham Family of Schools PPE Policy

Approved by the TGS, TCS & GEMS Boards 8/9/21

The novel coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice (e.g., while shouting, chanting, or singing). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that a significant portion of individuals with COVID-19 lack symptoms, and that even those who eventually develop symptoms can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools, the CDC recommends the implementation of multiple mitigation strategies (e.g., social distancing, cloth face coverings, hand hygiene, and use of cohorting). The CDC released their latest guidelines for schools. Mask wearing is highly suggested for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. Other key takeaways from this latest update from the CDC include:

- Emphasis on the importance of in-person learning
- Mask wearing outdoors is no longer a recommendation
- Safe distancing is now reduced to 3 feet
- Important to keep apprised of the COVID risk in the local community and adjust prevention strategies in response

We know from numerous medical and public health experts that the safest and most effective way to protect all of our students, staff, and their families, is to be vaccinated. We highly suggest and encourage that all students who are 12 years of age and older be vaccinated. We do understand that there are relatively few cases where someone may not be medically advised to receive a vaccine. We also know that the vaccine is more effective than the flu vaccine, it is safer, and it has been shown to be more than 99% effective with few side effects.

At The Graham Family of Schools, all employees and visitors who enter the building will be required to wear a face mask that covers the nose, mouth, and chin at all times, regardless of vaccination status. All students will be required to wear a face mask when in the building, regardless of vaccination status, unless they are unable to do so for a health or developmental reason. If this is the case, a doctor's note must be on file at the school explaining the reason for not wearing a face mask. TGFS will also reduce any social stigma for a student who, for medical or developmental reasons, cannot and should not wear a mask. Individuals will be permitted to remove their masks for eating and drinking. Personnel who work alone in an assigned work area such as a private office where others make appointments to meet are permitted to work without a mask while alone in those areas.

According to the CDC, "the more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. The risk of COVID-19 spread increases in school settings as follows:

- **Lowest Risk:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
- **More Risk:** Small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Groups of students stay together and with the same teacher throughout/across school days and groups do not mix. Students remain a minimum of 3 feet apart and do not share objects (e.g., hybrid virtual and in-person class structures, or staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes).

- **Highest Risk:** Full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students are not spaced apart, share classroom materials or supplies, and mix between classes and activities.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is needed to help prevent certain exposures and the spread of COVID-19. While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other prevention strategies. Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, face masks, and respiratory protection, when appropriate.

A “face covering” is a cloth or disposable face covering that covers the nose, mouth, and chin, such as a mask or neck gaiter. The face covering need not be a medical-grade mask. It should fit snugly around the side of the face without gaps, but not create difficulty breathing. The final decision as to the appropriateness of face coverings will be made by the building principal.

- *Bandanas are not adequate and not permitted.*
- *Respirators and gas masks are not permitted.*

A “face shield” is a clear plastic shield that covers the forehead, extends below the chin, and wraps around the sides of the face. Face shields are permitted but may not be used in lieu of face coverings unless specifically permitted by the Head Administrator or a student’s IEP or 504 team.

The Ohio Department of Health suggests that all types of PPE must:

- Use coverings that fit snugly but comfortably and allow for breathing without restriction, remain secure behind the head with ties or ear loops, and worn horizontally.
- Masks should not be touched while being worn. If this happens, hands should be washed immediately.
- Ensure that the nose, mouth, and chin are covered at all times.
- Be laundered after each use.

Face shields that wrap around the face and extend below the chin can be considered as an alternative where cloth face coverings would hinder the learning process. Some situations where face shields would be useful include:

- When interacting with students, such as those with disabilities, where communication could be impacted
- When interacting with English-language learners or when teaching a foreign language.
- Settings where cloth masks might present a safety hazard (i.e. science labs)
- For individuals who have difficulty wearing a cloth face covering

The school administration of each building will communicate a form of the following message to students, parents, and staff:

Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth while wearing face coverings or face shields to prevent potential contamination. Do not remove the face covering or shield to cough or sneeze. Wash your hands thoroughly before putting on a face covering or shield. Remove your face covering or shield carefully and wash your hands thoroughly after removing. Wash the face covering or shield after each use. Wearing a face covering or shield does not replace the need to continue frequent hand washing, avoiding touching the face, practicing social distancing, and staying home if you are ill.

Each school will provide disposable face coverings, as available, to anyone attempting to enter the building without one.

Students

All students in kindergarten - twelfth grade must wear a face covering while in School buildings or facilities, when riding in school-provided transportation, and when outside on School grounds or at a designated bus stop, **regardless of vaccination status**. Students may be excused from wearing a face covering under the following circumstances:

- While eating or drinking
- **During scheduled, outdoor recess.**
- temporarily, when appropriate social distancing measures are in place as determined by a teacher or administrator;
- in the case of a documented medical condition or disability of the student that would prohibit the use of face coverings;
- in the case of special behavioral, developmental, or individualized needs as determined by the student's IEP or Section 504 team;
- when actively engaged in exercise in an indoor facility so long as six or more feet of separation between students exists as determined by a teacher or administrator;
- when actively participating in athletic practice, scrimmage, or competition that is permitted under a Department of Health order; or
- on a case-by-case basis for specific instructional needs, such as speech therapy, as determined by a teacher.

The use of face shields, physical barriers, and/or social distancing will be required as alternatives, if appropriate, when face coverings are excused.

Students wearing face coverings determined to be in violation of the Dress Code or this Policy will be provided with a disposable face covering.

Students who refuse to wear an appropriate face covering under this Policy shall be subject to discipline and exclusion from onsite instruction.

Employees and Volunteers

All employees and volunteers must wear face coverings, **regardless of vaccination status**, while on school property and in school facilities, and while employees are performing work-related duties off of School property (including, but not limited to, athletic coaching, job coaching, and transporting students).

Employees may be excused from wearing a face covering under the following circumstances:

- a. The individual has a medical condition, **supported by a doctor's note**, including respiratory conditions that restricts breathing, mental health conditions, or a disability that contradicts the wearing of a facial covering; or
- b. The individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or has another disability, where an accommodation is appropriate or necessary;
- c. The individual is actively participating in outdoor recess and/or physical activity where students are able to maintain a distance of six feet or more or athletic practice, scrimmage, or competition that is permitted under a separate Department of Health Order;
- d. The individual is seated and actively consuming food or beverage;
- e. Where students and staff can maintain distancing of at least **three** feet and removal of the facial covering is necessary for instructional purposes, including instruction in foreign language, English language for non-native speakers, and other subjects where wearing a

- facial covering would prohibit participation in normal classroom activities, such as playing an instrument;
- f. Students are able to maintain a distance of **three** feet or more and a mask break is deemed necessary by the educator supervising the educational setting;
 - g. The individual is alone in an enclosed space, such as an office; or
 - h. When an established sincerely held religious requirement exists that does not permit a facial covering.

The use of face shields, physical barriers, and/or social distancing will be required as alternatives, if appropriate, when face coverings are excused. The school must provide written justification to local health officials, upon request, explaining why an employee is not required to wear a facial covering in the school.

School nurses or other staff members who care for individuals with symptoms must use current, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by the school in accordance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.

Employees who refuse to wear appropriate face coverings and are not subject to one of the listed exceptions will be subject to discipline. Volunteers who refuse to wear appropriate face coverings will be excused from volunteer duties and instructed to remain off School grounds.

Visitors

All visitors (parents, community members, vendors, etc.), **regardless of vaccination status**, who have permission to enter School grounds and facilities must wear face coverings consistent with this Policy, or face shields, as permitted by the school administration.

We will be continuously reviewing these procedures with students, staff and families as the year progresses.