



**The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind
2021-2022
COVID-19 Mitigation Instructional Plan
Revised September 10, 2021**

The VSDB Mitigation Plans are developed and maintained with the safety of students, staff, and the community in mind. The mitigation strategies outlined in the current plans meet or exceed the updated guidance levels provided by the Center for Disease Control, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Virginia Department of Education. VSDB's current plans reflect the highest level of safety criteria provided by those agencies and serve as the foundation for VSDB's implementation and maintenance of its mitigation health and safety strategies. As the pandemic situation improves and guidance is more relaxed, VSDB will adjust its level of implementation to reflect updated revised guidance.

Overview

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Return to School Instructional Plan was developed with the safety and health of students and employees as a priority. Its goal is to establish and maintain a safe and healthy learning and work environment to the greatest extent possible. The plan is aligned with guidance from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). With the ever changing situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan is considered a working document and will be revised as needed given new information and guidance.

Return to School

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) will return to in-person instruction on campus for all students beginning on March 15, 2021. The totality of the student population of VSDB is served through Special Education services. As a result, in order to maximize each student's learning potential and to meet individual learning needs, education services for all students enrolled will be provided **through an in-person instructional model that aligns to the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**. Any request to explore alternatives to the in-person instructional model will be addressed through the IEP team process.

VSDB provides an extended instructional day of 28.2 hours beyond the typical 27.5 hours in order to support maximum learning opportunities that will facilitate prescriptive instruction to address any gaps in learning due to the pandemic closure. Students will follow normal class schedules for both the school and residential programs with mitigation strategies in place to maintain a safe and healthy environment to the greatest extent possible.

Table of Contents

- I. Instructional Day**
- II. IEP Meetings and IEP Evaluations**
- III. Athletics, Extracurricular Activities, Computer Labs, and Communal Spaces**
- IV. Health, Safety and Social/Emotional Health**
 - General Health Screening**
 - School Building/Classrooms**
 - Cafeteria**
 - Gymnasium**
 - Teaching Kitchens**
 - Social/Emotional Health**
- V. Instructional Plan in the Event of a Future Closure**

I. Instructional Day

1. Daily in-person instruction will occur Monday-Thursday from 8:00am-3:15pm; Fridays, 8:00am-12:00pm.
2. Teachers will provide instruction on safe health practices to be observed in the school building, hallways, restrooms, classrooms, cafeteria, emergency drills, infirmary, gymnasium, and in related services classrooms.
3. Teachers will assess students' areas of need and determine learning gaps and needs using standardized and formative assessments to help guide instructional planning to develop individualized remediation plans as needed.
4. Remediation needs will be addressed through individual and/or small group tutoring as needed to support student progress and to address learning deficits that may have occurred due to the pandemic closure.
5. Teachers will establish online content as well to support student learning using the Google Classroom platform. This will be a secondary instructional mode and will be available in the event a student is unable to attend school for any reason.
6. Students are expected to attend in person everyday in order to be counted as "Present" in school. Established excused absences as defined in the *VSDB Student/Family Handbook* will be honored with proper notification from the parent/guardian or medical professional.
7. A *Home Technology Needs Assessment*, will be conducted/and or updated as needed in order to assess the technology and internet needs of each student's home and its ability to support online learning in the case of future pandemic related closures. Areas to be assessed include but are not limited to: access to adequate internet; availability to an internet capable device (Chromebook, iPad, tablet, laptop, etc.), and the availability of a valid Gmail account. VSDB will provide support to families who demonstrate technology needs to support learning through online formats.
8. In the event online instruction is not possible, VSDB will provide paper-based instructional packets to support on-going learning and facilitate support to parents. A system for sending and receiving the packets from school to home and back to school will be established.

II. IEP Meetings and IEP Evaluations

1. All IEP meetings will be conducted virtually through the Google Meet platform. Parents/guardians, outside agencies, LEA's and other IEP team members will be able to join meetings through the video conferencing process or on the phone using the Google Meet invitation credentials.
2. IEP meetings will be held following established timelines and all efforts will be made to ensure all stakeholders are able to participate.
3. IEP referred evaluations will be conducted in the most safe manner possible and will include a virtual option. The student's IEP team will determine the most appropriate method of assessment in order to obtain the most valid results.

III. Athletics, Extracurricular Activities, Computer Labs, and Communal Spaces

1. VSDB will not participate in any competitive athletic activities this school year. Intramural activities and sport clinics will be facilitated following all health and safety guidelines from VDOE, VDH, and the CDC.

2. Clubs and/or other group activities will be facilitated after careful consideration and approval by the administration to ensure all health and safety guidelines can be followed by all participants.
3. No large group parties, dances, assemblies or other special events will be permitted during the first semester.
4. All computer labs in the school buildings will be closed to student use. Students will access technology through other means such as student issued Chromebooks, iPads, or other technology devices based on the needs of individual students.
5. There will be no large group meetings held in any communal space on campus.
6. There will be no field trips off campus during the 2020-2021 school year. Virtual field trips will be encouraged.

IV. Health, Safety and Social/Emotional Health

VSDB is working closely with the VDH and VDOE to establish and maintain safe and healthy practices and procedures on campus to keep all students, staff and employees safe. The following are safety and health measures that align with the CDC and VDH guidelines and that will be followed during the 2020-2021 academic year:

General Health Screening

1. All students and employees will be required to undergo a daily health screening and temperature check.
2. Parents will be required to self-report that their student is asymptomatic and has not been exposed to the COVID-19 virus while not on the VSDB campus.
3. All VSDB employees will be required to self-report they are asymptomatic and have not been exposed to COVID-19 each day when reporting to work.
4. Parents are required to self-report any time their student or any family member in the household is suspected of exposure to or has tested positive for COVID-19.
5. VSDB is required to inform all stakeholders, including parents/guardians in the event of any known exposure or confirmed case of COVID-19 on campus.

School Building/Classrooms

1. Classrooms will be structured so that all students will maintain safe social distancing from other students and the teacher by placing furniture at least 6 feet apart.
2. A maximum of 8 student desks will be established for each classroom in order to maintain safe distancing. If a class has more than 8 students enrolled, this class will be split between two classrooms and be supported by a teacher's aide to facilitate instruction.
3. All employees and students will be required to wear a face covering at all times.
4. When a safe distance of 6 feet or more can be maintained, teachers and other instructional staff will be permitted to remove their face covering for a brief period of time if needed, to ensure effective communication for students who are deaf and communicate through sign language which is dependent on grammatical features for clear communication. In addition, the removal of masks for a brief period of time, when safe and deemed necessary, supports effective communication for voice instruction for those students who are visually impaired.

5. Staggered dismissal times will be established for class changes to limit the number of students in the halls.
6. Teachers and/or teacher's aides will be in the hallway to monitor students to help maintain safe distances and to keep students moving to their next destination; Educational staff will be wearing face coverings in case close proximity to students is needed to gain their attention or for student assistance.
7. Students will be required to wear face coverings as developmentally appropriate. Face coverings will be provided to those students who are unable to secure a covering from home.
8. Hallway traffic will be structured with clear travel patterns using floor markers to mitigate close contact with others. This practice will be specifically taught during the first week of school.
9. Safe distance markers will also be placed in hallways and office areas to help students and staff to maintain the recommended safe 6 feet of distance.
10. Adaptation to hallway and classroom markers will be made to support those students who are visually impaired.
11. Cleaning and disinfection practices will be intensified by VSDB housekeeping staff and instructional staff. Following each class period, staff will wipe down hard surfaces and other frequently touched surfaces with recommended cleaning supplies before the next group of students arrive for class.
12. Established hand washing breaks will be established each day and will be supervised by staff. Students will be reminded to wash their hands in instances such as blowing their nose, sneezing, coughing, before eating, and before and after using the restroom.
13. Hand sanitizer will be made available to staff and students in the event soap and water hand washing is not readily available.
14. Outside visitors to all school buildings will be limited. Parents are always welcome to visit VSDB. It is requested that any visit be made known in advance and arranged with school administration to ensure that CDC and VDH safety guidelines can be maintained.
15. Field trips, assemblies, off campus work-based placements, and group gatherings will not be permitted. Online field trips will be encouraged; online formats will be used to facilitate guest speakers and school assembly needs; on campus work sites will be established following health and safety guidance to ensure students are able to benefit from these valuable experiences.
16. Student lockers will be assigned to ensure safe distances are maintained.

Cafeteria

1. All meals will be scheduled on staggered times to limit the number of students in the cafeteria at one time.
2. Tables will be placed based on CDC guidelines in order to maintain safe social distancing.
3. Students will be assigned a seat where they will remain for the entire meal.
4. Hand sanitizer will be made available as students enter the cafeteria and students will be monitored to ensure that they use the product correctly.
5. Meals will be brought to the students at their table in order to ensure social distancing.
6. There will be no shared space such as a serving line, self-serve options, salad bar, or milk cooler.
7. Staff will be available to assist students as needed and will be required to wear a face covering at all times and wash hands or hand sanitizer in between each student interaction.

8. Meal cleanup will be facilitated by staff. Students will remain at their tables and trays and trash will be cleared one table at a time.
9. Students will be dismissed in a staggered fashion by table to return to school.

Gymnasium

1. Small class sizes and large instructional areas accommodate safe social distancing during PE instruction.
2. Locker rooms will be monitored by appropriate staff during clothes change to assist students with maintaining safe and healthy practices.
3. Any classroom-based instruction will be structured with desks placed at least 6 feet from each other and masks utilized when social distancing cannot be maintained.
4. PE staff will be required to wear face coverings when close contact is needed to assist students with instruction, health, or for behavioral reasons.
5. Non-contact activities will be presented.
6. Increased sanitation and disinfection of hard surfaces will be employed when students are using exercise equipment; recreational items; or other materials.

Teaching Kitchens

1. Kitchens will be set up in order to maintain safe distances during instruction.
2. A limit of 2 students will be permitted in the cooking area of the kitchen; depending on the activity, to ensure safety and social distancing.
3. Thorough cleaning of all hard surfaces, utensils and cooking equipment will be done following each instructional event in the kitchen.
4. Students will be instructed in safe work practices in the kitchen including the importance of handwashing during food preparation.
5. Masks and gloves will be required during cooking activities.

Social/Emotional Health

1. All school-based staff will receive specific professional development on supporting student social and emotional health.
2. Professional development will include how to recognize concerns related to student social/emotional health; how to promote positive social/emotional health; use of “Safe” spaces on campus to help the students manage social/emotional needs.
3. School counselors and community-based counselors will be available for all students and families to help manage social/emotional and mental health needs.
4. VSDB’s Family Engagement Specialist will be made available to assist students and families accessing services as needed in their home area.

V. Instructional Plan in the Event of a Future Closure

In the event of another state mandated closure of public schools for in person instruction, VSDB will activate the following plan:

1. Instruction will move to full-time online format using Google Classroom.
2. Classes will establish scheduled meeting times or instructional posts for students to access while at home.
3. Based on the *Home Technology Needs Assessment*, families will be provided necessary technology based on the needs of their student.
4. In the event online instruction is not possible, VSDB will provide paper-based instructional packets to support on-going learning and facilitate support to parents. A system for sending and receiving the packets from school to home and back to school will be established.
5. Teachers will make weekly contact with students and/or parents/guardians to assist with instructional needs. This may include but not limited to video, email, phone, or text messaging.
6. Students will be required to complete assignments for a grade.
7. Online assignments will be assessed through the Google Classroom.
8. Paper based assignments will be assessed through an established system which may include postal mail, fax, or scanned emails based on family needs.
9. Students will be required to participate in instruction whether presented in person, virtually, or through packets, in order to be counted as “Present” in school.
10. Requests to not participate in online or paper-based instruction will be reviewed by the student’s IEP team.
11. Any deviation from the proposed instructional plan will be addressed through the IEP team to determine the appropriate placement and options for educational services.

If you have any questions regarding the *VSDB Return to School Instructional Plan*, please contact:

Keith Van Fossen/Principal
keith.vanfossen@vsdb.k12.va.us
(540) 332-9014