



Malta Public Schools

"Home of the Mustangs & M-Ettes"

"A Tradition of Excellence"

Malta Public Schools Reopening

In trying to develop a plan on how best to start the 2020-21 school year, Malta Public Schools has worked with local health officials, surveyed parents, students, and staff members, and considered the recommendations provided by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, the Governor's Office, the Center for Disease Control, and various other educational organizations in the state of Montana. All of this information has been applied to the shared goal of how best to have students return to school for in-person instruction while protecting the health and safety of our students and staff.

We are pleased to present to you a plan that allows for students to return to our school buildings for face-to-face learning this fall. However, like many parts of our daily lives, the start of our school year will carry with it some inconveniences. Under the current CDC and county health department guidelines, if a student or staff member of Malta Schools is found to have COVID-19, that person would be made to quarantine for at least 14 days. In addition, contact tracing would commence which would require any person who was in direct contact (within six feet for at least 15 minutes) with the infected person to also quarantine for 10-14 days. It is not hard to see that in a school environment, even with social distancing restrictions in place, that even one case could impact a large number of students and staff, resulting in many days of school missed and potentially serious health consequences. Not to mention that the start of the new school year usually coincides with the cold and flu season. The largest threats to our ability to have students in our schools for the duration of our school year is if we have a spike in COVID-19 cases forcing us to reduce the number of students in our building at one time or not having enough teachers and substitute teachers to adequately staff our classrooms.

This leads to our first and most important line of defense to keeping our school open to on-site learning. If your child is not feeling well or showing symptoms of illness, please keep them home. We know that it can be inconvenient to keep a child home when parents are working and that the initial inclination for most of us is to "tough it out" and keep moving. However, in our current situation, we need sick children to stay at home until they are feeling better. We are asking parents to self-assess their child(ren) each day, looking for the following symptoms of COVID-19: 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, vomiting, or diarrhea. A smaller inconvenience for a family in the short term is preferable to the major inconvenience that a school shutdown or alternate day schedule would create. Teachers will be flexible with make-up work requirements and instruction will be available online to allow those children to stay on track.

In the opening plan, you will notice some differences between the Elementary School procedures and those of the Middle/High School. The ability to social distance students and limit interactions is different between these buildings due to the nature of the types of courses and how those must be scheduled and the age of the students. Students and staff will have the option of wearing masks while in the classroom. Social distancing will be utilized to the extent that the classroom allows. In the Elementary School, student movement throughout the building will be limited by keeping groups of students together through the majority of the day and having the teachers come to them rather than having the students move from class to class. In the Middle/High School we are planning to have students transition between classes using the normal bell schedule. To accommodate this large number of students in the hallway at one time, students and staff will be asked to wear facial coverings. This will also be required during the times before school, during lunch break, and after school when there are large numbers of students in the hallway at one time and social distancing is not feasible. The facial covering requirements may change to align with state/local government or health department guidelines.

Each student in grades 6-12 will be issued a Chromebook at the start of the school year, which they will bring to class. This will eliminate multiple students sharing the same Chromebook. Students will be responsible for their devices. Each student having a device will help facilitate the continuation of learning should the need arise for offsite instruction for large numbers of students or the entire school.

Mealtimes will be staggered in both buildings to limit the number of students in the cafeteria at one time. Frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing stations will be available in both buildings and arrival times will be altered to prevent large numbers of students from hanging out in the hallways before school.

We did not identify a specific threshold that would move our district from Stage B to Stage C. If the move into Stage C is necessary, it will be determined in conjunction with state/local health departments. Our sincere hope is that Stage C is not necessary.

We understand that this is not a perfect plan however, it was created with the overall student and staff safety in mind, along with the shared goal of having as many students in our building for face-to-face learning as realistically possible. Due to the quickly changing nature of this pandemic, this plan must remain fluid and will be adjusted as necessary to address new information and developments. All parents, students, and staff must be prepared for the potential we could move from one stage to the next with little notice or the potential that our school buildings may be shut down for onsite learning at some point during this school year. We believe that our plan will allow us to transition to this quickly, efficiently, and still allow for significant learning and instruction to occur.