

Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind Safe Start to School Guide



Where Endless Opportunities Abound!

August 28, 2023

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SUPERINTENDENT – August 28, 2023

Dear Families,

As we near the fall and winter months, COVID-19 numbers continue to rise with the new subvariant known as EG.5. As with recent subvariants, EG.5 has a lower rate of hospitalization and mortality.

Face coverings are not required on campus. The CDC recommends that students/staff wear a mask for 10 days after exposure or if they are feeling ill.

We will continue frequent hand sanitization and social distancing when possible, plus we have an ActivePure Air Purification System in every classroom. In addition, we now have home tests readily available should a student or staff member need one. We will continue to monitor and follow guidance from the Mississippi State Department of Health found and the CDC.

I would like to encourage you to talk to your doctors about vaccination and/or boosters. Free vaccinations are available and can be found at: https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420,976.html For more information regarding the effectiveness or health concerns surrounding vaccines, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/>

If your child is sick, with or without fever, please keep them home and have them tested as soon as possible. If modifications to our Safe Start to School Guide are needed, we will notify you via email, social media, and by all other possible means of communication. Be well!

Sincerely,

Jeremy Stinson, Ph.D.
MSDB Superintendent
jeremy.stinson@msdbk12.org
(601) 984-8203

GENERAL INFORMATION

Our district is the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) with two distinct schools. The Mississippi School for the Deaf serves children from age 3-21 who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. The Mississippi School for the Blind serves children from age 3-21 who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. Our agency also includes statewide services which encompass our birth to three SKI*HI program and other services that are in development, the Mississippi Assistance Center (MAC) which provides appropriate sensory-specific assessments and recommendations to families and districts and facilitates the admissions process to both schools, and the Mississippi Instructional Resource Center (MIRC) which provides access to textbooks and instructional materials to districts serving students with visual impairments.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

In-Person Learning

All MSDB students will continue with in-person learning. Due to the increasing COVID-19 numbers, we ask that parents and other visitors get prior approval before coming to campus, except for athletic events and urgent matters pre-approved by the principal or superintendent.

Virtual Option Due to Exposure or Outbreaks

Though our goal is to remain on campus the entire year, there may be times when an individual student, small group, or class requires isolation. There also may be rare times when our adult supervision coverage is inadequate to meet student needs. Our goal will always be to avoid temporary closure or isolation at all costs.

If the virtual option is needed, students will receive mostly live, virtual instruction from a certified teacher, and a classroom assistant may help virtual students through tutoring sessions. There also may be some independent work required when the teacher is not live on the screen. All virtual instruction and learning must total at least 330 minutes through the Learning Management System (LMS) called Canvas, which is the equivalent of a full day of in-person learning.

Before a student is allowed to participate in virtual learning due to an exposure or outbreak, he or she must meet the following eligibility criteria, and the student/parent must agree to abide by the policies below:

- Parents and students must sign and return the agreement in Appendix A of this plan that acknowledges receipt and acceptance of, and commitment to, the district policy pertaining to virtual learning.
- Students **MUST** have reliable internet connectivity at home, or parents should request a hotspot. If the hotspot will not work, students will be required to complete learning packets, which include the same assignments that would be given in virtual instruction.
- Students must use their school-issued device for virtual learning.
- Students **MUST** have a designated space for virtual learning that is quiet, private, and free from distractions of other household members and household noises.
- The student **MUST** maintain good attendance and be logged in on time for each class for a total of 330 minutes each day.
- Virtual students will be held to the same code of student conduct requirements as

- in-person students.
- All students have assurance of equal access/nondiscrimination while participating in virtual learning.
- All students have the assurance of the delivery of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities including a:
 - a. process for conducting meetings pertaining to the evaluation and eligibility of students with disabilities.
 - b. process for monitoring and documenting student progress and services delivered to students with disabilities; and
 - c. process for ongoing communication with families, teachers, and related service providers.
- All students will have assurance of compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) while participating in virtual learning.

Technology

We have achieved our goal of providing one-to-one, age-appropriate devices to use in the classroom and at home as needed. Internet hotspots will also be available to families who need them if the hotspot will work as an option for Internet access from home. Parents and students will be required to sign the MSDB Acceptable Use Policy before being issued any device. Students and parents will continue to receive training as needed on proper device usage and the online Learning Management System (LMS) called Canvas. Families who still have no Wi-Fi access after all attempts to remedy the issue will be provided learning packets, which include the same assignments that would be given in virtual instruction.

Attendance

Attendance will be documented as present or absent, whether a student is in-person or virtual. If virtual, the student must sign into Canvas and be present to be counted. If students use learning packets due to lack of wi-fi or have temporary wi-fi issues, each school will make one-on-one contact with a student for the day to authenticate their presence and provide daily evidence of engagement. Students must attend class for a minimum of 330 minutes of instruction per day. After five (5) unexcused absences, an attendance officer will be notified.

OPERATIONS

Transportation

Day Commuters:

Please check with your local district for their cleaning and sanitizing bus protocols. Please remember if your child is not riding the bus due to illness, emergency, or times of campus closure, it is your responsibility to contact your district's transportation department and let them know.

Residential Students:

- MSDB buses will be sanitized before and after each transportation trip.
- Whenever possible, windows may be lowered to encourage air flow.
- Whenever possible, social distancing requirements will be followed.

Food Services

Students will be eating in the cafeteria unless social distancing is needed due to rising cases. If numbers increase, meals will be provided for students and staff in “to-go” boxes to mitigate spread. Four separate areas on our campus are available to support efforts to social distance during lunch: the cafeteria, student center, bistro, and recreational building. Pick-up times will be staggered to allow for better social distancing if necessary.

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Masks

- Masks are not required on campus, but the CDC does recommend wearing a mask for 10 days after exposure or if feeling ill.
- It is recommended students/staff wear them when they are feeling ill or are trying to reduce exposure as they feel necessary.
- Everyone should keep a mask on-hand to show common courtesy and respect when entering someone’s personal space (three feet or less).
- Social distancing will still be practiced at six feet if at all possible.

Temperature Checks

- Temperature checks will be used if needed to mitigate spread of the virus.
- Staff and students should self-monitor their health symptoms and stay home if sick and/or have a fever of 100.4 or higher.

Sanitation & Safety Protocols:

1. Hand sanitizer stations are in the office, cafeteria, dorms, gymnasiums, auditoriums, health center, and all classrooms.
2. Restrooms are continuously stocked with soap, and disinfectant spray is being utilized daily for all door knobs, light fixtures, keyboards, and desks.
3. Students and staff should use hand sanitizer when entering and leaving any building. Handwashing with soap for 20 seconds or longer is required before leaving the restroom.
4. Desks and materials will be wiped down with disinfectants after any in-class transition or sharing of materials.
5. Each student will have a 1:1 device for use on campus to avoid cross-contamination.
6. Every attempt will be made to have a substitute teacher in the classroom if a teacher becomes ill. Combining classes will be a last resort, and the combined class will follow social distancing guidelines. This may mean moving the classes to a larger space in the building.
7. Restrooms are cleaned and sanitized thoroughly each night by the custodial staff.
8. Residence hall students will have their own bedrooms and bathrooms if possible.
9. Residence hall bedrooms and bathrooms will be cleaned each day by the student according to current practice.
10. Residence hall door knobs and light switches will be wiped down and sanitized by residential staff before departing for the day.
11. Students and staff will use hand sanitizer upon entering and leaving the residence halls.
12. Residence halls will be cleaned thoroughly on Fridays after students leave.

If you test **POSITIVE** for COVID-19 (Regardless of Vaccination Status):

1. If a staff member/student tests positive for COVID-19, then he or she must stay at home in isolation for 5 days **after the day of the positive test**. The staff member/student must have improved symptoms after the 5-day isolation period and be fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications to be able to return to school.

2. Please provide a copy or screenshot of the first positive test result to the principal, supervisor, and/or nurse to keep on file. You are not required to retest since you can test positive much later than the 5-day period.
3. If an individual has no symptoms but tests positive with a rapid test or home test and tests negative within 48 hours with the molecular-based test, the individual may return to school and monitor symptoms.
4. If a student is sick on campus with COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever of 100.4 or higher, cough, or shortness of breath), he or she must report to the Health Clinic for isolation, evaluation, and testing. Parents will be notified if necessary to pick up the student. Symptomatic staff members must go off campus for testing immediately. Free tests are available at all times for staff and students. Free COVID testing sites and appointment scheduling can be done by calling 855-767-0170. If the initial test is negative, documentation must be provided to the principal or supervisor for the staff member/student to return to school.

If you are EXPOSED to someone who tests POSITIVE for COVID-19:

1. Administration will begin contact tracing if necessary to determine who may have come into close contact with the positive individual (less than 6 feet, at least 15 minutes combined).
2. Anyone exposed to COVID-19 must test at school on day 5 after exposure.
3. Staff/students who have no symptoms, no fever, and have been in close contact with someone testing positive for COVID-19, will be monitored for symptoms and fever.
4. The MS State Department of Health has provided testing kits free of charge for school use and are housed in the Health Clinic. If a student/staff member is symptomatic, MSDB will provide a test. If negative without fever, the person will be monitored, retested if necessary, and a mask will be recommended. If positive, those identified as close contacts/exposed can test to stay on campus for work/school. They can test each day for 5 days after exposure. As long as the test remains negative and there are no symptoms, the person can stay on campus. If the test is negative, but the person has symptoms, isolation will be required. If the test is positive, the person will be required to isolate for 5 days. After 5 days, the person can return to school if symptoms are improving and there has been no fever for 24 hours.

If the person identified as close contact does not consent to testing, they will be required to isolate for 5 days if they are unvaccinated, outside of 90 days from infection, or outside of 6 months from last vaccination/booster. In this case, a staff member will have to use leave for the absences. Student(s) will have to be virtual for the quarantine period and counted absent if they do not follow virtual learning procedures.

5. Staff and students must provide documentation of test results anytime a test is taken off-site. Please take a screenshot of the result and email it to your immediate supervisor or your child's teacher.
6. A staff member/student does not have to isolate if he or she has had COVID within the past 3 months if they have no symptoms, regardless of booster status.
7. All areas visited by a symptomatic, COVID-positive person will be sanitized and remain vacant for at least 24 hours.
8. Administrators may have to temporarily close classrooms, hallways, schools, or campus for cleaning.
8. Staff members who are required to isolate due to a positive test will consult with their supervisor, who will then consult with the superintendent regarding use of leave or working remotely.
9. Staff and students are highly encouraged to provide the principal or supervisor with a copy of his or her vaccination/booster card, if applicable.

10. An outbreak is defined as ≥ 3 cases of COVID-19 in a classroom or group of 30 or less (sports team, group activity, band, or other) or 10% or more of larger groups infected over a 14-day period.
12. MSDB will consider dismissal of the entire campus under the following conditions.
 - If ≥ 3 individual classroom settings, defined groups, or defined buildings are experiencing simultaneous outbreaks, or
 - If multiple absentees or exclusions of students and staff are leading to disruptions in on-campus functioning and impacting the learning environment as determined by the schools.
 - If dismissal of the campus is warranted,
 - All extracurricular activities will be canceled according to MHSAA guidelines.
 - The dismissal time frame will be determined by the superintendent and will be based on circumstances and CDC/MSDH guidance.
 - The dismissal time frame may have to be extended for issues beyond our control such as delayed testing, extended wait times, infection after the 5th day, etc.

Sports and Events

MSDB will follow state, county, and city ordinances related to groups of people gathering but reserves the right to create policy above and beyond the ordinance requirements.

COMMUNICATIONS

Primary Health and Safety District Contacts

Dr. Jeremy Stinson, Superintendent
jeremy.stinson@msdbk12.org
(601) 984-8203

Dupe Oluwatade, Health Clinic Supervisor
modupeola.oluwatade@msdbk12.org
(601) 984-8121

Information and Updates

Follow our Facebook pages:

MSD: <https://www.facebook.com/MississippiSchoolForTheDeaf/>

MSB: <https://www.facebook.com/mississippischoolfortheblind/>

Check our websites often:

MSDB: msdbk12.org

MSD: msdbk12.org/msd-homepage/

MSB: msdbk12.org/msb-homepage/

Appendix A: Virtual Learning Commitment

Criteria Checklist: Please answer each statement/question by circling YES or NO and return this to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

1. I have reliable high speed internet service at home (a working hotspot device qualifies). YES or NO
2. My child has a district-issued device to be used for virtual learning. YES or NO
3. My child will have a quiet and private designated space at home free of disruptions from household noises and free from disruptions from other people in the home. YES or NO
4. I understand and agree that my child MUST maintain good attendance. Three (3) or more unexcused absences in nine weeks may result in attendance violations. YES or NO
5. I understand and agree that my child will be logged in for each class, on-time, every day. Three (3) or more late logins OR three (3) or more occurrences of the student not completing the full school day in nine weeks may result in attendance violation. YES or NO
6. I understand and agree that my child will be held to the same code of student conduct requirements as in-person students. YES or NO
7. I understand and agree that my child MUST attend school in-person on designated assessment days. Students will be scheduled in a manner that will allow for social distancing on assessment days. YES or NO

I understand this document is for use only if the school is required to operate virtually or if my child is required to isolate/quarantine at home or under the care of a doctor preventing them from attending in-person classes.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Student Name: _____