

**POLARIS ELEMENTARY
SAFE RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION
AND CONTINUITY OF SERVICES PLAN**

**SEMIANNUAL REVIEW
NOVEMBER 2023**

**Polaris Elementary School District
Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan**

Date of Original Adoption: May 1, 2020

Dates Reviewed: August 6, 2020; August 18, 2020; June 10, 2021; December 9, 2021;
June 9, 2022; November 9, 2022; May 11, 2023; November 8, 2023

Date Plan was Last Revised: November 8, 2023

Next Regularly Scheduled Month for Consideration: May 2024

March 2020 – November 2023

1. The Polaris Elementary School District was ordered to close to in-person instruction on March 15, 2020, under an executive order issued by then-Governor Bullock. Districts were provided a two-week period of time during which they could remain fully closed to instruction of any kind while developing a plan for remote instruction required by the Governor.

Although our district was authorized to remain closed, we quickly mobilized and began remote instruction during the timeframe when we were authorized to remain closed. Thereafter, our district continued pursuant to a reopening plan approved by the Governor beginning March 30, 2020.

2. On April 22, 2020, then-Governor Bullock lifted his Stay at Home Order, and Announced a Plan to Begin Phased Reopening of Montana. As part of that plan, effective May 7, 2020, all schools were provided the option to return to in-classroom teaching at the discretion of local school boards.

Our school district finished the 2019-20 school year through remote/offsite instruction.

3. Our school district reopened to in-classroom instruction during the 2020-21 school year, and was fortunate to remain open for in-person instruction for 96% of the school year. During the school year, there was a temporary closure of all in-classroom teaching pursuant to quarantine or isolation orders issued by our county department of health. Our temporary closure to in-classroom teaching was for seven school days from November 23, 2020 - December 3, 2020. During the 2020-21 school year, our means of operation included:

- i. In-person
- ii. Offsite

Our school district finished the 2020-21 school year strong, having provided high quality learning opportunities to the students in our community in safe and effective learning environments.

4. Our school district developed a plan for reopening to in-person instruction, with contingencies, and we implemented that plan for the 2020-21 school year. The reopening plan, details regarding which are provided below, included adoption of various model policies provided by the Montana School Boards Association under its 1900 Series, including model policies aligned with the Centers for Disease Control guidance regarding mitigation strategies to limit exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 in school settings.
5. In June 2021, our school district crafted this Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services plan. In August 2021, the board of trustees declared their own unforeseen emergency to last through June 30, 2022, in accordance with sections 20-9-801 through 20-9-806, MCA, due to community and school health concerns related to COVID-19.
6. During the 2021-22 school year, our modes of operation were:
 - i. In-person
 - ii. Offsite

Our district provided offsite instruction for students issued with quarantine or isolation orders, or who chose to self-quarantine or self-isolate.

We remained open for 98% of the school year, only having to close to on-site instruction for three days from January 17-19, 2022. During that time, instruction was carried out remotely with all students.

Following the procedure in adopted policy 1905, the requirement for mandatory face coverings was lifted on April 14, 2022, when the transmission level in the county declined to the moderate level. The policy was aligned with the Centers for Disease Control guidance regarding mitigation strategies to limit exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 in school settings. Monitoring of the county transmission level occurred daily throughout the remainder of the school year using the CDC COVID Data Tracker website. The county transmission level remained low or moderate for the remainder of the school year and face coverings were optional as personal protective equipment.

In June 2022, the board of trustees declared their own unforeseen emergency for the period July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, in accordance with sections 20-9-801 through 20-9-806, MCA. Face coverings as personal protective equipment will be considered optional for the 2022-2023 school year.

7. In August 2022, the County Health Department provided our rural teaching staff with the latest updated CDC guidance regarding COVID-19 testing, isolation, quarantining, social distancing, and masking. This guidance helped staff to better

understand the potential risks, proper protection actions to take, and what actions to take if sick or test positive for the virus.

8. In November, the board of trustees aligned policy 1905 with the guidance provided to our teaching staff in August, as well as CDC recommendations.
9. On February 10, 2023, the President temporarily extended the declared national emergency for COVID-19. At that time, he concluded his announcement with a statement that the anticipated termination of the national emergency concerning COVID-19 pandemic would end on May 11, 2023.
10. Policies 1900-1912 were intended to govern during the declared emergency related to COVID-19 declared by the President, Congress, Montana Legislature, Governor, Montana Department of Health and Human Services, County Health Department, and board of trustees. With the termination of the national emergency concerning COVID-19, in April 2023, the board of trustees voted to terminate their declared emergency and temporary emergency policies numbered 1900-1912, and work with necessary stakeholders to enact their motion.

11. For the 2022-2023 school year, our mode of operation was:

- i. In-person

There were no temporary closures due to quarantine or isolation orders.

12. For the 2023-2024 school year, our mode of operation has been:

- i. In-person

There have been no temporary closures due to quarantine or isolation orders.

13. We have embraced a fundamental principle of providing extensive transparency to our community throughout the above timeframe. We publicly noticed, held meetings regarding, and provided extensive opportunities for our community to provide us with feedback regarding the school district's plans and we carefully considered such feedback in developing and refining the school district's plans throughout the last 45 months.

Safe Return to School and Continuity of Services Plan Contents:

March 2020 – November 2023

Part I: Documentation of Meaningful Consultation in Developing and Refining the School District's Plan from March 2020 Through November 2023:

We noticed, held, and invited public comment on our evolving plans for a safe return to school and continuity of services on the following dates since March 2020:

1. March 26, 2020
2. April 9, 2020
3. May 1, 2020
4. July 9, 2020
5. August 6, 2020
6. August 18, 2020
7. September 10, 2020
8. March 11, 2021
9. April 8, 2021
10. May 13, 2021
11. June 10, 2021
12. July 8, 2021
13. August 12, 2021
14. September 9, 2021
15. October 14, 2021
16. November 11, 2021
17. December 9, 2021
18. January 13, 2022
19. February 10, 2022
20. March 10, 2022
21. April 14, 2022
22. May 12, 2022
23. June 9, 2022
24. July 14, 2022
25. August 11, 2022
26. September 8, 2022
27. October 13, 2022
28. November 9, 2022
29. December 8, 2022
30. January 12, 2023
31. February 9, 2023
32. March 9, 2023
33. April 13, 2023
34. May 10, 2023
35. May 12, 2023
36. June 7, 2023
37. June 15, 2023
38. July 13, 2023
39. August 10, 2023
40. September 13, 2023
41. October 12, 2023
42. November 8, 2023

To the extent present in or served by our school district, our invitation for public input included a general opportunity for the public to provide input and was provided to everyone interested, including:

1. Students; families; community members; county administrators (Superintendent of County Schools, county health nurse); teachers (we do not have a union), other educators, school staff; and stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities (parents).
2. We are a very small rural school district with no diverse student groups. Furthermore, we do not have any tribes, civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations), English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, or other underserved students present in or served by the school district.
3. Beginning in July 2021, a standing agenda item, "Consideration of Changes to Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan", has been added as a means for the board of trustees to invite monthly stakeholder discussion. This will be in effect throughout the 2021-24 school years.

Part II: Contents of the School District's Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services:

1. A description of how the district will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff:

Following the lifting of the Stay-at-Home Order and subsequent reopening of the state on April 22, 2020, Polaris Elementary School District utilized the Montana Public Education Center *Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana's Public Schools Using Emergency School District Policies* and accompanying MTSBA Model Emergency Policies. Utilizing these resources supported our school district's continued service to students with transparency and accountability while ensuring the operations of the school district reflected the circumstances in our community.

The policies ensured our board of trustees and school leaders honored the following priorities: quality instruction to students; a healthy and safe setting for students, staff, and the community; needed support of teachers and staff; and responsible financial and operational procedures. The policies provided an actionable plan for completing the 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 school fiscal years in a manner that met these priorities and secured district funding while providing an operational platform for considering long term innovations in the delivery of education services.

Polaris Elementary School District implemented policy options that facilitated collaboration between the board of trustees, staff, employees, parents, students, health officials, and community as we established protocols aligned with CDC guidance

addressing how instruction was to be delivered to students; how gatherings and events would take place on school property; how the health and safety of staff and students would be protected and preserved while school was open; and how financial and operational functions of the school district would continue during the period of public health emergency.

Polaris Elementary School District reviewed, considered, and addressed numerous areas of operation in our reopening process. On the topic of school district policy and procedures, the district considered emergency policies and procedures, adoption and amendment of policies, suspension of policies, and administrative procedures. To support students' academic, mental, social and emotional success, the district considered alternative grading, counseling, extended school year, student instruction proficiency determinations and declarations, support for particularly vulnerable students, access to internet for students, food preparation, summer school and additional student instruction resources. To ensure the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff, the school district considered cleaning and disinfection, community use of facilities, county board of health orders, diagnosis and confidentiality, hand washing and related hygiene protocols, telework, school closure orders, stay at home orders, symptom monitoring and isolation, travel quarantines, visitors, volunteers, vulnerable individuals, masks and personal protective equipment, and physical distancing.

Following the *Roadmap for Safely Reopening Montana's Public Schools Using Emergency School District Policies* ensured Polaris Elementary School District has remained in compliance with guidance and best practices provided by federal, state, or local health officials. Our school district has continued to adapt and adjust our policies as new and updated guidance and best practices have become available.

Further, the policies provide options for consideration through input from our board of trustees, administrative team, employees, parents, students, health officials, and community as collaborative partners as we have worked our way through ever evolving changes due to the pandemic. By considering all possible perspectives and factors when making the decisions to adopt or adjust a policy, or to implement a policy, we focused on the health and safety of our students, staff, and community for delivery of learning and services to our students. The policies have enabled us to adjust our procedures and practices during different phases in compliance with guidance and best practices provided by federal, state, and local agencies.

Polaris Elementary School District followed their temporary emergency policies for most of the 2022-2023 school year (9½ months). The district will continue to follow the policies noted below for the remainder of the 2022-23 school year (2½ months). We will engage in a semiannual reevaluation process of this Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan to continue to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our students, teachers, staff, and community throughout the 2021-24 school years.

2. The extent to which the district has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the following safety recommendations established by the CDC:

Topic	School District Policy Reference	Description of Policy	Policy Adopted and Revised Date(s)
<p>Collaboration with State, local or territorial health departments: student health and safety – student immunization and communicable diseases.</p>	<p>3413; 3417</p>	<p>Please note that House Bill 702 passed the 2021 Legislature and was signed into law effective May 14, 2021. New Section 1 of that law provides that it is an unlawful discriminatory practice for a governmental entity to refuse, withhold from, or deny to a person any local or state services, goods, facilities, advantages, privileges, licensing, educational opportunities, health care access, or employment opportunities based on the person's vaccination status. The law also provides it is unlawful for an employer to refuse employment to a person, to bar a person from employment, or to discriminate against a person in compensation or in a term, condition, or privilege of employment based on the person's vaccination status. Finally, House Bill 702 provides it is unlawful for a public accommodation to exclude, limit, segregate, refuse to serve, or otherwise discriminate against a person based on the person's vaccination status.</p> <p>3413: Upon initial enrollment, an immunization status form shall be completed by the student's parent or guardian. The certificate shall be made a part of the student's permanent record.</p> <p>3417: In all proceedings related to this policy, the district will respect a student's right to privacy. Although the district is required to provide educational services to all school-age children who reside within its boundaries, it may deny attendance at school to any child diagnosed as having a communicable disease that could make a child's attendance harmful to the welfare of other students. The district will rely on advice of the public health and medical communities in assessing the risk of transmission of various communicable diseases to determine how best to protect the health of both students and staff. The district will manage common communicable diseases in accordance with Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services guidelines and communicable diseases control rules. The district may temporarily exclude from school attendance a student who exhibits symptoms of a communicable disease that is readily transmitted in a school setting. The district may notify parents of other children attending a school that their children have been exposed to a communicable disease without identifying the particular student who has the disease.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 10/13/2016 2. 07/08/2021 3. 09/09/2021 4. 07/13/2023 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 07/08/2021

<p>Appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies: student instruction – student instruction innovations; Section 504; online and distance learning; enrollment and attendance records.</p>	<p>2050; 2162; 2162P; 2168; 3121</p>	<p>2050: The board of trustees authorizes offsite and online instruction of students in a manner that satisfies the aggregate number of instructional hours outlined in the school district’s adopted or revised calendar. Offsite and online delivery methods shall include a complete range of educational services offered by the school district and shall comply with the requirements of applicable statutes. Students completing course work through an offsite or online instructional setting shall be treated in and have their hours of instruction calculated in the same manner as students attending an onsite institutional setting.</p> <p>The board of trustees authorizes proficiency-based ANB calculation in situations when a student demonstrates proficiency in a course area as determined by the board of trustees using district assessments consistent with the school district’s adopted Plan of Action or other measures approved by the board of trustees.</p> <p>2162: It is the intent of the district to ensure that students who are disabled within the definition of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are identified, evaluated, and provided with appropriate educational services. For those students who need or are believed to need special instruction and/or related services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the district shall establish and implement a system of procedural safeguards.</p> <p>2162P: If the parent or legal guardian of a student who qualifies under Section 504 for special instruction or related services disagrees with a decision of the district with respect to: (1) the identification of the child as qualifying for Section 504; (2) the district’s evaluation of the child; and/or (3) the educational placement of the child, the parents of the student are entitled to certain procedural safeguards. The student shall remain in his/her current placement until the matter has been resolved through the process set in the policy.</p> <p>2168: The district may receive and/or provide distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs to provide a greater variety of learning experiences within the student’s educational program.</p> <p>3121: The district may only include, for ANB purposes, any student who participates in pupil instruction as defined by Section 2-1-101(17), MCA, and for whom ANB may be claimed under Title 20.</p>	<p>1. 06/10/2021 2. 11/11/2021 3. 07/13/2023</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007</p> <p>1. 11/08/2007 2. 11/11/2021 3. 05/12/2022 4. 07/13/2023</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007 2. 05/08/2008 3. 09/13/2017 4. 09/09/2021 5. 11/11/2021</p>
---	--------------------------------------	--	--

			6. 05/12/2022 7. 07/13/2023
Coordination with State and local health officials: district operations, student health and safety – district policies and procedures; school emergencies and closures; student immunization; communicable diseases; community use of facilities; district safety.	1310; 2221; 3413; 3417; 4330; 8301	<p>1310: The district's policies are adopted, implemented, and enforced in accordance with the supervisory authority vested with the board of trustees in accordance with Article X, section 8 of the Montana Constitution and related statutes, regulations and court decisions.</p> <p>2221: The board of trustees is authorized to declare that a state of emergency exists within the community. A declaration issued by the board of trustees is distinct from any declaration in effect or previously issued by local, state or federal authorities. An emergency declaration issued by the board of trustees authorizes the district to take extraordinary measures to protect students and staff while delivering education services in a manner authorized by law. The method and location of instruction and related educational services shall be implemented in a manner that services the needs of students, their families, and staff and preserves the district's full entitlement funding.</p> <p>3413: The board requires all students to present evidence of their having been immunized against certain diseases.</p> <p>3417: The district will manage common communicable diseases in accordance with Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services guidelines and communicable diseases control rules. When information is received by a staff member or a volunteer that a student is afflicted with a serious communicable disease, the staff member or volunteer will promptly notify local health authorities to determine appropriate measures to be taken to protect student and staff health and safety. The staff member, after consultation with and on advice of public health officials, will determine which additional staff members, if any, have need to know of the affected student's condition.</p> <p>4330: School facilities are available to the community for educational, civic, cultural, and other noncommercial uses consistent with the public interest, when such use will not interfere with the school program or school-sponsored activities.</p> <p>8301: The district recognizes that safety and health standards should be incorporated into all aspects of the operation of the district. The board of trustees has identified local hazards that exist</p>	<p>1. 03/08/2007 2. 03/08/2012 3. 06/10/2021</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007 2. 06/10/2021</p> <p>1. 10/13/2016 2. 07/08/2021 3. 09/09/2021 4. 07/13/2023</p> <p>1. 07/08/2021</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007</p> <p>1. 10/10/2013 2. 10/13/2016 3. 11/14/2019 4. 07/08/2021</p>

		within the boundaries of its school district The board shall develop safety and health standards which comply with the Montana Safety Culture Act to ensure a safe school setting and to comply with regulations governing schools in Montana.	5. 07/13/2023
Services to address students' academic needs and students' and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs: student instruction – student instruction innovations; special education; online and distance learning; enrollment and attendance records.	2050; 2161; 2168; 3121	<p>2050: The district authorizes offsite and online instruction of students in a manner that satisfies the aggregate number of instructional hours outlined in the school district's adopted or revised calendar for a school year affected by a public health emergency. Offsite and online delivery methods shall include a complete range of educational services offered by the school district and shall comply with the requirements of applicable statutes. Students completing course work through an offsite or online instructional setting shall be treated in and have their hours of instruction calculated in the same manner as students attending an onsite institutional setting.</p> <p>2161: The district shall provide a free appropriate public education and necessary related services to all children with disabilities residing within the district, as required under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (hereinafter "IDEA") and implementing provisions in Montana law, and the Americans With Disabilities Act.</p> <p>2168: The district may receive and/or provide distance, online, and technology delivered learning programs to provide a greater variety of learning experiences within the student's educational program.</p> <p>3121: The district may only include, for ANB purposes, any student who participates in pupil instruction as defined by Section 2-1-101(17), MCA, and for whom ANB may be claimed under Title 20. As accurate enrollment and attendance records are essential both to obtain state financial reimbursement and to fulfill the district's responsibilities under the attendance laws, the district shall be diligent in maintaining such records. Assignment to schools shall be subject to modifications when federal law applicable to students placed in foster care or students who are homeless requires that such students be educated in a "school of origin" that differs from the assigned school.</p>	<p>1. 06/10/2021 2. 11/11/2021 3. 07/13/2023</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007</p> <p>1. 11/08/2007 2. 11/11/2021 3. 05/12/2022 4. 07/13/2023</p> <p>1. 03/08/2007 2. 05/08/2008 3. 09/13/2017 4. 09/09/2021 5. 11/11/2021 6. 05/12/2022 7. 07/13/2023</p>

June 2021

Part III – Updated Compliance for the District's Previously Adopted Plan for the Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services:

Section 2001(i)(3) of the ARP Act states that a school district that developed a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services prior to the date of enactment of the ARP Act will be deemed to have met the requirement to develop a plan under section 2001(i)(1) as long as the plan meets the statutory requirements (*i.e.*, is publicly available on the LEA's website and was developed after the LEA sought and took into account public comment).

The school district's plan meets the requirements of Section 2001(i)(1) and (i)(2) of the ARP Act. The school district's plan is available on the Office of Public Instruction's website, as well as a MTSBA-hosted website and, as noted above, was developed through a process that included extensive public comment. Further, we have, as part of the organization of the school district's plan for purposes of the ARP Act, revised the school district's plan at a meeting held on June 10, 2021, that included not just a notice of opportunity for public input but which specifically invited meaningful consultation with and input from:

Students; families; community members; county administrators (Superintendent of County Schools, county health nurse); teachers (we do not have a union), other educators, school staff; and stakeholders representing the interests of children with disabilities (parents). We are a very small rural school district with no diverse student groups. Furthermore, we do not have any tribes, civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations), English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, or other underserved students present in or served by the school district.

We considered the input of all affected parties and carefully deliberated regarding the best possible means by which our district could provide safe effective learning environments for each of our students.

June 2021 - September 30, 2024

Part IV – Schedule for Future Review and Updates:

Consideration of this Safe Return to Schools and Continuity of Services Plan has been added as a standing agenda item on each regular and special meeting of the board of trustees since July 2021 and will remain so throughout the 2021-24 school years. The agenda item shall, at a minimum, include notice of any changes to the plan recommended by the administration with an invitation for input, notice of opportunity for public input, and consultation with, to the extent present or served by the district:

Students; families; community members; county administrators (Superintendent of County Schools, county health nurse); teachers (we do not have a union), other educators, school staff; and stakeholders

representing the interests of children with disabilities (parents). We are a very small rural school district with no diverse student groups. Furthermore, we do not have any tribes, civil rights organizations (including disability rights organizations), English learners, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migratory students, children who are incarcerated, or other underserved students present in or served by the school district.

Polaris Elementary School District will continue to follow their policies while engaging in a semiannual reevaluation process to continue to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our students, teachers, staff, and community throughout the 2021-24 school years. The next scheduled review will be May 2024.