

POLICY
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

GENERAL AND INTERIM POLICY ON COVID-RELATED ISSUES
School Year 2021-2022, including ESY

Rhode Island School for the Deaf (RISD) acknowledges the continuing COVID-19 emergency, intensified by the highly contagious DELTA variant of the SARS-CoV2 virus, and is concerned for the health and safety of its students, families, faculty, and staff.

In the past year, the Governors of Rhode Island have issued orders declaring a state of emergency due to the dangers of COVID-19, issuing quarantine and isolation orders, and mandating masks for all persons over the age of two years with appropriate social distancing in all State buildings and facilities in order to protect the public and State employees.

The RI Department of Health (RIDOH) and the RI Department of Education (RIDE) have issued, among other forms of guidance, a *PreK-12 Health & Safety Guidance* that is regularly updated, which requires all staff and students to use face covering in indoor settings regardless of vaccination status, and *Outbreak and Response Protocols PreK-12* sets forth a comprehensive and updated guidance on those protocols to follow in the event of the presence of COVID in schools.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also recommends universal indoor masking for all students, staff, educators and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. CDC emphasizes that widespread vaccination is a critical tool to help stop the pandemic.

In light of these public health declarations and guidance, and in accordance with RI Gen. Laws § 16-26-3.1 *Board of Trustees of RISD* and the responsibility given to the Director, and General Law §16-2-9 *Powers and Duties of a School Committee*, which together vest in the Board the responsibility of addressing the needs, care, safety, health and wellness of its students and employees, the Board of Trustees of RISD has agreed to the general mandates for the 2021-2022 school year including ESY.

1. All employees, regular volunteers, Board members, coaches, and student teachers/interns must be fully vaccinated and provide proof of vaccination by November 15, 2021, subject to certain exemptions to be implemented in accordance with state and federal law;
2. All employees must obtain a “booster vaccine”, when approved and available;
3. All persons, including short term visitors and consultants, shall wear face masks that cover the nose and mouth while inside the school buildings and on school buses, except for children under the age of 2 years of age or persons with a disability that prevents them

from wearing a mask safely as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as explained in the *CDC Guidelines for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 schools.*

4. Educators and staff shall wear clear masks whenever possible to allow good visual access to our deaf and hard of hearing students who are reliant on facial expressions and lip reading for full understanding.
5. An exemption from proof of vaccination may be made, on occasion, for urgent repair and maintenance workers who are escorted to a work site such as the boiler room and will not come into areas where there are students, faculty and/or staff.

The Board of Trustees further amends its general safety policies to advance the following goals for the full school year, including ESY in July:

- Promote and ensure the health and safety of students and staff, and all who may come into contact with them at school, through reliance on science, data, and guidance from public health leadership to inform decision-making.
- Comply with all orders from the Governor and follow the guidance of the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) and other agencies of state and federal government to the extent feasible.
- Conduct high quality and effective educational services in-person five days/ week unless mandated by Executive Order or by RI Department of Health to do otherwise.
- Empower the Director and staff to act quickly, deliberately and decisively to make changes as the pandemic variables change in order to promote safety.
- Ensure academic support for those students in general and for those at highest risk in particular due to health, educational needs, as well as those who experience social and economic risk.
- Empower the Director to conduct precautionary COVID testing on-site as guided by RIDOH.
- Encourage vaccination for family members, and conduct periodic vaccine clinics, with ASL interpreters available for the community, on-site in collaboration with RIDOH and the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RICDHH).

The Director shall have full authority to take whatever steps are needed, subject to Law and collective bargaining agreements, to exercise the authority to implement all aspects of staffing and effective administration to serve the best interests and safety of staff, faculty, students, their families and the community. Policies and practices may be subject to modification by the Director if they interfere with safety.

Privacy of Students

During this current pandemic, the rights to privacy held by students and their families shall not be infringed by the District. Such rights extend to the confidentiality of student academic records, health data, economic status, and any other information that is considered confidential by law.

Visitors in School Buildings

Subject to current emergency declarations, the Director may propose changes to district policies regarding visitors during the school day and after school hours. All visitors attending school functions, volunteering, or attending meetings longer than fifteen (15) minutes, will be required to provide proof of vaccination. All visitors must wear face coverings covering the mouth and nose.

- Audiology patients, most of whom are children, also will be waived from providing proof of vaccination. Strict and unique protocols shall be implemented for the Audiology Clinic, specifically, to ensure that those young patients and their accompanying adult all wear face coverings and that they visit the Clinic portion of the building, only, and do not enter the academic school building.
- Parents who may not be vaccinated, participating in the Early Childhood Program (PIP) held on-site once weekly on Tuesdays shall enter through a dedicated door at the far end of the school, shall enter the PIP room directly from that door and leave via the same door, thereby not moving through academic areas where RISD students are located.
- An exemption from proof of vaccination may be made, on rare occasion, for critical repair and maintenance workers who are escorted to an urgent work site and will not come into areas where there are children or students. If there is an urgent need that requires that they enter a classroom area, if at all possible this will be rescheduled after school.

Athletics and Extra-Curricular Activities

All players on all teams shall be required to wear masks during team sports of any kind. Visiting teams shall be masked during sports activities.

Students participating in extra-curricular activities and clubs shall also wear masks covering nose and mouth while at school.

COVID Testing and Contact Tracing

The Director shall establish protocols for COVID testing for both pool (group) testing and symptomatic testing of students and may implement procedures for contact tracing as a means of locating students who may be contagious or identifying others who may have had exposure to COVID-19 at school. This shall be completed with guidance from RI Department of Health and RIDE and be consistent with standards to protect the privacy of students, their families and other persons.

Approved: October 13, 2021, effective 10/15/21