

**WHITEHALL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**PO Box 29, 87 Buckley Road, Whitehall, New York 12887-3633**  
**Whitehall – Birthplace of the U. S. Navy – [www.railroaders.net](http://www.railroaders.net)**

**Ethan Burgess**  
Jr-Sr High School Principal  
518 499-1770  
[eburgess@railroaders.net](mailto:eburgess@railroaders.net)

**Patrick M. Dee**  
Superintendent of Schools  
518 499-1772  
[pdee@railroaders.net](mailto:pdee@railroaders.net)

**Judy Gould**  
Elementary School Principal  
518 499-0330  
[jgould@railroaders.net](mailto:jgould@railroaders.net)

**Julie Umar**  
Director of Special Education  
518 499-1771  
[jumar@railroaders.net](mailto:jumar@railroaders.net)

**Kate DuBois**  
School Business Manager  
518 499-0346  
[kdubois@railroaders.net](mailto:kdubois@railroaders.net)

April 15, 2021

Late last Friday, the New York State Department of Health released updated guidance on the daily operation of schools during the COVID 19 pandemic. Over the past few days, the district has been reviewing the guidance with our Safety and Risk Management Specialists as well as the Washington County Department of Health.

When the guidance was originally released, the prevailing thought, and hope, was that the new guidelines would allow schools to bring back more students by reducing the required distance between desks from 6 feet to 3 feet. While this reduction in space is included in guidance, there are many other variables and additional protocols that are required and the space reduction is not an automatic.

Most importantly, beginning immediately, the New York State Department of Health, has determined that masks are required to be worn on school grounds by all parties, at all times, regardless of the space between individuals. Our current model of practice, which was previously allowed by NYS, allowed students, as well as adults, to remove their masks if there was 6 feet of separation – unfortunately, NYS has changed this rule. The only exception to this rule is when students are eating. Additionally, NYS has redefined the guidelines for masks and all masks must now be at minimum, two-layers thick. Most masks meet these criteria, but for those who wear gators or bandanas, they must now be folded up to include two layers.

As for the reduced spacing between desks. This is not an option for our Middle and High School students. Using the new CDC metrics, Washington County is labelled as a "High Risk" area and in order to reduce the spacing between desks, we would need to cohort our Middle/High School. Cohorting, using the cohort definition from the CDC, is not feasible for most Middle or High Schools, including Whitehall, given the varying needs of our students. This may be an option in the Elementary School, but the 6 feet of distance, while wearing a mask, may reduce possible quarantines for exposed students. And this has to be a consideration. Additionally, we have not been given Guidance that will permit us to put more than 1 student in a bus seat further limiting our ability to bring students to campus.

While this is a lot of information to take in, at this time, the only change that the district can and must implement is the requirement that all individuals wear a mask at all times within the building. Again, this is not a local decision, this is a mandate from the NYS DOH via CDC guidelines.

While this news is certainly disappointing and while the guidelines are more restrictive than our current practice, the district will continue to follow the CDC and DOH guidelines to the best of our ability and work to ensure the safety of everyone in our buildings. We are continuing to work with our partners at the Washington County Department of Health and if there are any new updates, I will make sure to keep everyone informed.

I truly wish I had better news-

  
Patrick Dee  
Superintendent of Schools