



# August Back to School Update

for Owl Parents and Families - August 2021

## From the Head of Schools

Dear Owl Parents and Families,

The first day of school is closely approaching in less than two weeks!! Please carefully review this very important communication that includes COVID-19 updates, reminders, calendar updates, academic and guidance announcements, dress code clarifications, and athletic programming notes in the pages below. We will continue to update this document as the school year begins, and it will always be available on [our website](#) under the “Inside OCS “ tab [Head of Schools Page](#).

## COVID Updates, Layered Mitigation, Vaccination

As we prepare to open school, we must confront the substantial spread of the Delta variant in our region and across the nation. A spirit of continued optimism, patience, and flexibility will remain vital to our success as we begin the new school year. In conjunction with recommendations from the US Department of Education, the Delaware Department of Education, the Department of Public Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Nurses and the Odyssey Return to Learning Survey administered in June 2021 with responses from over 1,000 families, Odyssey Charter School will be operating live and in person to begin the school year. The decision is not only supported by a plethora of research indicating students across all grade levels,



demographics, socioeconomic status and ethnicity learn best in the classroom with certified teachers but also by 92% of our families surveyed across all grade levels. Accomplishing this goal will take cooperation, communication, and work. We are still determining what will be recommended and what will be required by state and public health officials. Guidelines will inevitably continue to adjust as we learn more about virus mutations and variants but I will provide some guidance based on current requirements.

Our goals for the school year are clear, and will be pursued simultaneously:

1. *Resume high quality in person instruction and more in person student attendance, interaction, and learning;*
  2. *Execute what is required of us to preserve and promote community health.*
- Based on the [emergency declaration](#) made by our governor just last week, masks will be required in all grade levels, K-12, irrespective of vaccination status for the foreseeable future. Research has consistently and repeatedly indicated that masks are one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of the virus. We certainly look forward to setting masks aside as soon as safely possible for the sake of social wellness, relationship-building, and overall development, but we cannot ignore the current context, and must always account for the health and safety of others, including those we come into contact with after the school day: parents, grandparents, siblings, and other members of the public. For those students in some of our specialized programs like the Greek Immersion Program, please know we are looking at all ways to promote the best learning environment possible for our students, including the purchase of clear, anti-fog masks to help with the language acquisition.

As part of the mitigation strategy, Odyssey Charter School is asking all parents of students grades 6-12 and all staff to report their vaccination status. The more students (grades 6-12) that are vaccinated, the less likelihood of disruptions to our school life and to



specific events, groups, teams, and classes. With more students in school this year, and social distancing more challenging, unvaccinated students will be more at risk, both for themselves and others. Vaccination is the only realistic path to a normal school year - not just at Odyssey, but at *any* school. This measure will allow our school administration to properly plan for potential outbreaks, improve mitigation strategies, and create realistic goals for our school moving forward. If students or staff vaccination status is unknown or unreported, based on Department of Public Health and CDC protocols, we will need to assume that these persons are unvaccinated. In cases where exposure to COVID occurs either through direct contact or close contact, those who are unvaccinated and/or not reported as vaccinated will need to quarantine for the full two weeks or as required. However, those who are vaccinated could still test and return to school within 24 hours based on a negative test result.

For unvaccinated students at Odyssey, we will respect family decisions regarding their children's health and well-being, but expect an acknowledgement of the risks and cooperation in regard to wearing masks, socially distancing as directed, and other protocols that have been proven effective in keeping unvaccinated students safe. For fully vaccinated students, infection control measures will still be necessary due to the substantial spread in our region and the possibility of breakthrough infections. We understand the frustration about the possible continuation of blanket precautions despite being vaccinated, even for brief periods. Please know that we will be carefully considering the recommendations and requirements for schools as they are posted, exploring and pursuing all available options and the application of appropriate protocols for students who are fully vaccinated.

Again, the more of our students and staff who are fully vaccinated, the healthier our school community will be. Achieving a critical mass of vaccinated students and faculty will enable us to operate school *both* normally *and* safely. To reach that goal will mean remaining resilient, accepting the ever-changing nature of life and information in a



pandemic, and most importantly, being as understanding and supportive as possible as we work through these challenges and make the best decisions we can for our students and families.

## **Safety Matters: What are we doing to stay safe?**

- Updated HVAC system to include bi-polar ionization filtration across all buildings allowing for cleaner circulating air in our classrooms
- Bio-Protect antimicrobial desk treatments in all classrooms every 60 days (recommended is every 90 days) to create cleaner classrooms.
- Revised schedules to offer lunch more frequently and/or efficiently in the day so cohorts could remain smaller and safer
- Purchase of an outdoor “dining tent” to help with maintaining smaller cohort sizes during breaks
- Mandate mask requirement and social distancing for all indoor spaces K-12.
- Seating arrangement maps for all classes, including lunch, for proper contact tracing
- Unidirectional traffic flow protocols to maintain safe distancing indoors.
- Visitor temperature checks and monitoring of health and wellness through School Pass.
- Hand sanitizer stations in every bus, classroom, cafe, and building throughout the campus
- Increased outdoor activities, classes and dining as possible
- Staggered schedules to reduce traffic flow in halls between classes
- Increased frequency of bathroom and common area cleanings
- Increased custodial presence to maintain cleanliness throughout the school
- Increased surveillance testing from monthly to weekly for the coming school year through our partner, Quidel.
- Now offer onsite PCR testing with results in 24-48 hours allowing for accurate data regarding Covid cases in our community
- Encourage all students and staff to receive available vaccinations



- Implement updated CDC/DPH/Government guidelines and recommendations for social distancing and face coverings.

## Antigen Testing On Site

Studies have convincingly demonstrated that high-frequency point-of-care antigen testing has a benefit in congregate settings such as schools. Delaware's schools have demonstrated how an antigen testing program can be easily and successfully integrated into school operations to help protect against COVID-19 infection within educational settings, with more than 84 schools participating in testing throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Our school specifically operated the entire second semester of the 2020-21 school year using the antigen testing for surveillance purposes and were able to successfully bring back over 60% of our students for live in-person instruction with zero outbreaks. Through this experience and continuous feedback from all stakeholders, we have been able to improve the program sustainability, as well as identify areas for additional support and improvement. This year we will be partnering with Quidel to conduct weekly antigen testing of students. In the beginning of the fall semester, we will be testing all students regardless of vaccination status in order to gather the proper baseline data. We are also asking all staff to test so we have a fuller picture of the state of our community as the school year begins. The initial testing will begin late next week and carry through the first two days of school. Following that, our goal is to be at full testing capacity by September 6 so we can conduct weekly testing. As the semester continues, with guidance from Public Health authorities, we will be looking to ease testing frequency for vaccinated students and staff. One major improvement to the program includes on site PCR testing for individuals testing positive with the antigen test, with results available within 24-48 hours. For vaccinated individuals, this means a negative PCR result would only keep them out of school for one to two days, instead of the mandatory quarantine that will be required for those unvaccinated. With the implementation of the Quidel Turnkey Testing program, we have eliminated all burden-sharing while providing an efficient and optimized process for school-based antigen testing, permitting our educators



to focus on the critical task of growing and shaping our youth while enjoying the evidence-based safety and security that screening testing brings to bear. Please look out for a detailed email from Quidel and our partners at DPH that will include online consent forms and other detailed information regarding initial baseline testing.

## Testing

For individuals who are not vaccinated, testing is key to identifying and preventing additional infection. DPH recommends the following updated guidance for unvaccinated people:

- Get tested once a week.
- Get tested 5-7 days after being exposed to someone with COVID.
- Isolate at home immediately if unvaccinated and develop symptoms of COVID-19, and quarantine at home immediately if exposed to someone with COVID-19.

The CDC recommends fully vaccinated persons get tested 3-5 days after being exposed to someone with COVID. Fully vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine after exposure to someone that has tested positive for COVID-19.

## Face Coverings

Per the governor's emergency order, face masks are required for all indoor instruction, K-12, both in private and public schools. Face coverings will not be required for outdoor play, although specific mitigation measures will be used in these instances.

## Quarantine/Isolation

*What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?*

Isolation and quarantine help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease. Isolation separates sick people with a contagious



disease from people who are not sick. Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

Quarantine is a required precaution to protect others from exposure should the person become positive after an exposure. Quarantine is considered a mitigation strategy; it is not just implemented during an outbreak situation. Source:

<https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/index.html>

It is likely that we will have more individuals identified and out of school because they are quarantined – identified as close contacts of positive cases – rather than positive cases in isolation. Attached here is a [Close Contact/Quarantine Guideline](#) our school will be following.

*Do individuals who have been confirmed positive for COVID-19 in the past or are fully vaccinated still need to quarantine?*

No, individuals who have tested positive in the previous 90 days for COVID-19 do not need to quarantine during this period. Likewise, a fully vaccinated individual (who is two weeks post the last or only dose of the vaccine) does not need to quarantine after a known or suspected exposure to a positive case if asymptomatic, but should still monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure. Unvaccinated individuals or those who do not provide their vaccination status **WILL BE REQUIRED TO QUARANTINE.** If someone is currently COVID-19 positive, they should isolate, regardless of their vaccination status.

## Turning Instructional Loss into Learning Gains

As mentioned above, Odyssey Charter School believes students will learn best and achieve the greatest academic gains when learning is live and in-person, under the supervision and guidance of their highly qualified teachers. Odyssey therefore has created a comprehensive plan to address instructional loss through the addition of a daily reinforcement and enrichment block across all grade levels. This block will be used to address last year's instructional loss due to the pandemic but also address future instructional loss in the event a student contracts COVID-19 and is required to remain



home. Students will be encouraged to focus primarily on their recovery during their absence and will use the daily reinforcement block upon their return to school to receive proper instruction from their teachers and make up assignments. Deadlines will be relaxed to allow for proper reinforcement of the material. Since most assignments are already posted to Schoology, students may be able to complete some of the work during their time away, but Odyssey believes the long term understanding of the learning targets will require students to receive proper instruction, through the use of our extra learning block. In specific circumstances, teachers may reach out to students and families to explore potential opportunities for students to “zoom’ into small group reinforcement sessions during their absence. Additionally, the amount of assignments required to be completed during the COVID-19 absence may be reduced, but these situations are specific to the grade level, teachers, and courses.

## Additional Supports

For families with students who have verified medical conditions that specifically prevent the student from returning to live and in-person instruction, please reach out to your school level administration for potential alternatives. Odyssey Charter does not offer an online schooling program for the 2021-22 school year, but there may be some alternatives available for students who have bonafide medical conditions. Please note that any alternative programming is a commitment by the student and family for the entire 2021-2022 school year. Due to scheduling and space issues, Odyssey is unable to move students from alternative programs into the live and in-person program after the school year begins on August 30th.

As part of the launch of the Return to School Roadmap, the U.S. Department of Education released:

A [fact sheet](#) for schools, families, and communities on the Return to School Roadmap, reviewing the three “Landmark” priorities, and elevating schools and districts that are addressing each in effective ways.





A [guide](#) for schools and districts outlining what schools can do to protect the health and safety of students, including increasing access to vaccinations and steps for implementing the CDC's recently updated K-12 school guidance.

A [checklist](#) that parents can use to prepare themselves and their children for a safe return to in-person learning this fall, leading with vaccinating eligible children and masking up if students are not yet vaccinated.

## Next Steps: UPDATE VACCINATION STATUS!!!

We need an accurate sense of who is and is not vaccinated. We therefore require every family to **report student vaccination status (Grades 6-12) to the building level nurse prior to the start of the fall semester on August 30, 2021.** We cannot prepare the most appropriate responses for life, learning, and a healthy school community without this data. Please provide evidence of your vaccination status to the nurse reports below. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Nurse Reports:

Grades 6-8 Kristin Weaver

[kristin.weaver@odyssey.k12.de.us](mailto:kristin.weaver@odyssey.k12.de.us)

Grades 9-12 Brittney Henning

[brittney.henning@odyssey.k12.de.us](mailto:brittney.henning@odyssey.k12.de.us)

## VACCINATION CLINIC



## **Important Vaccination Opportunity - Ages 12 and Older**

[Delaware Vaccination Information](#)

**Fun Fact:** *Did you know that according to the Delaware Department of Public Health, MORE THAN 96% of physicians surveyed by the American Medical Association reported they are vaccinated? WOW!*

## **IMPORTANT DATES AT-A-GLANCE**

### **Cross Country (Co-Ed), Soccer (Mens), Volleyball (Womens), Cheer(Co-Ed) begin**

Monday, August 16

### **School Reopening Town Hall**

Wednesday, August 25, 6:00pm

- In Person: High School Cafeteria
- Online: [zoom link](#)

### **Back to School Bash: Sponsored by the PTO**

Thursday, August 26 from 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm on the Athletic Fields

### **Freshman Orientation**

Monday, August 30 from 7:45 am - 2:30 pm



**Fall Sports Parent Meeting**

Tuesday, August 31, 7:00 PM on Zoom (link to be provided)

**First Day of School**

Monday, August 30 for Grades K, 3, 6, 9

Tuesday, August 31 for all students, K-12

**Senior Parent Information Night**

Coming this September - Stay Tuned!

**Labor Day Holiday**

School Closed Monday, September 6

**Title I Parent Meeting**

Tuesday, September 14, beginning at 6:00 pm

More information to come!

**Save the Date! Back to School Night**

Wednesday, September 22 (*Financial Aid Night HS Seniors*)

Thursday, September 23

(Times to be announced)

## IMPORTANT ACADEMIC NOTES

### Student Schedules for 2021-2022



Lower School and Intermediate School postcards will be mailed on August 20th containing information regarding your student's teacher assignments. All Middle School students will have access to their schedules on HAC and will have a hard copy mailed home the week of 8/23/21. High School students will receive a course schedule on the first day of classes. High School students who are requesting a course change must follow the procedures outlined on Schoology. These procedures will also be emailed home to all HS families after the start of school. The Counseling Office must be clear of class changes in mid-August to allow time for school year preparation and final class assignments. Please note that work is still being done in some cases to adjust class sizes.

## **Course Materials/Supply Lists for 2021-2022**

Most course material requirements have been communicated in previous messages. Please review this [Course Materials/Supply Lists Guide](#) to learn more about how materials will be managed for each specific grade.

## **ATHLETICS**

Preparation is key to one's success and we look forward to the beginning of another year of Odyssey Charter Athletics. If you have questions about our Athletics program, please reach out to the Athletic Director, Ms. Kelly Ellis, at [Kelly.Ellis@odyssey.k12.de.us](mailto:Kelly.Ellis@odyssey.k12.de.us).

### **Fall Sports**

**Preseason Info:** Communication regarding tryouts and protocols for fall sports have been sent out in our August 9th message to families. It is attached [here](#) for reference.

### **Vaccinations & Athletics**

**We strongly encourage student athletes to get vaccinated for the benefit of our school**



**community and their respective teams. This will help to prevent interruptions in the sports season, the need for a team quarantine, and the spread of the disease overall.**

## **DRESS CODE GUIDELINES**

### **Dress Code Updates**

Please refer to this [link](#) that can also be found on our website.

Thank you so much for reading this communication in its entirety and for choosing Odyssey Charter Schools! We look forward to a most rewarding school year and a return to more “normal” operation as a community school. As always, if you have specific questions, please feel free to reach out to members of our [school support team](#) whose contact information can be found [here](#).

In Partnership,

Elias Pappas  
Head of Schools