



## COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for the 2021-2022 School Year

### 1. INTRODUCTION

La Tierra Community School's Health & Safety Guidelines are driven by three principles. La Tierra will:

1. Act with fidelity to LTCS's Vision, Mission, and Goals by delivering quality education to all students that is engaging, rigorous, and provides continuity throughout the duration of the school year.
2. Prioritize full in-person learning over other learning models, and implement creative strategies to keep students coming to school in-person, even if community metrics indicate high transmission of COVID-19.
3. Focus on student and staff health, safety, and well-being by promoting hygiene and health-related policies that are research-based, clearly communicated, effectively implemented, and enforced.

LTCS would like to thank its students for their resilience, adaptability, and spirit; its parents for their support, patience, and understanding; and its staff for their courage, professionalism, and dedication. The 2020-2021 school year was an especially challenging one for all of us, but we are confident that the 2021-2022 school year will be exciting and productive for all of our students and staff. We will continue to operate under the guidance of Yavapai County Community Health

Services (YCCHS), Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Yavapai County Education Service Agency (YCESA) and other governmental agencies.

### Rights & Responsibilities within the LTCS Community

**Rights** – Every student, teacher, or staff member should be known, valued, and cared for. This fundamental right accompanies membership in La Tierra’s school community. It implies we all have a right to expect both emotional and physical safety. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this means members of our community can reasonably expect a heightened level of concern for their health and wellbeing. While it is possible that students, teachers, or staff members will be exposed to COVID-19 in the course of their work or studies, everyone is entitled to expect that reasonable effort and reasonable precaution will be taken to prevent this from happening.

**Responsibilities** – Our Commitment also implies that members of our community should Know, Value, and Care for others. Our interactions with others (friends and strangers, students and adults) should be self-aware, respectful, and courteous. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this means complying willingly with rules and policies designed to keep our community safe and healthy. We must be thinking of others, appreciating that their risk tolerance might be lower than ours, and adjusting our behavior with sensitivity and respect. Respecting policies and expectations, even when inconvenient to ourselves, is non-negotiable. In some communities, measures taken to prevent COVID-19 infection have ignited conflicts between the liberty of individuals and perceptions of the common good. We expect our community to openly accept the following guidelines:

- Members of our community and visitors to our campus follow guidelines and policies regarding wearing masks, washing and disinfecting their hands frequently, minding physical distancing norms, and staying home when sick;
- Members of our community and visitors to our campus respectfully interact with each other in and out of the classroom, and take responsibility for maintaining a healthy environment;
- Members of our community and visitors to our campus follow self-screening guidelines for symptoms of illness and refrain from coming to campus when symptomatic; and
- Members of our community and visitors to our campus comply with isolation and quarantine rules regarding exposure to COVID-19.

## Objective

**Objective** – The objective of this document is to provide LTCS administration with guidelines when making decisions related to COVID-19 health and safety protocols, instructional models, and other COVID-related decisions. LTCS knows that information, guidance, and recommendations from trusted sources may change or be adjusted as we continue to move through this pandemic. This document will be used to help guide decisions to continue to keep our schools open for in-person instruction in a manner that is safe and healthy for students, staff, and families. Additionally, this document may be updated as new information about COVID-19 becomes available and/or new recommendations to mitigate COVID-19 spread are made by public health agencies.

## Monitoring & Evaluation

LTCS administration understands that we will need to adjust and change our mitigation measures throughout the 2021-2022 school year as it is likely that our community will experience changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes could include community metrics continuing to decrease, a spike in COVID-19 cases, a new variant introduced into our community, or another unforeseen scenario. In coordination with La Tierra’s Directors, YCESA and YCCHS, La Tierra will continually monitor COVID-19 cases in our community and schools and evaluate the effectiveness of health and safety mitigation measures. LTCS is committed to implementing health and safety measures when and where they are needed, but we are also committed to eliminating measures that may no longer be necessary to continue to move toward a more “normal” in-person school experience for our students.

## **2. NEW CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR**

**Vaccines** – Any person 12 years of age and older is now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. La Tierra estimates that about 85% of our staff are vaccinated. Additionally, students 12 and older have started to receive the vaccine. La Tierra encourages families to get vaccinated to protect themselves and others from contracting COVID-19.

**Long Term Remote Learning Option Not Available** – LTCS will not be providing a long term, individualized remote learning option for the 2021-2022 school year. Because of this, it’s important that La Tierra is cognizant that some families may still have concerns and worries about COVID-19. Additionally, without a remote learning option, student density will increase in our schools and classrooms.

**New Mitigation Measures** – Arizona received about \$220 million from the federal government allocated for COVID-19 testing in schools. LTCS will implement COVID-19 testing for grades 4-7. This testing is called Concentric Pool Testing and will be implemented with parental permission by the classroom teacher 1x per week. More information will go out to families prior to the first week of school.

**Revised Community Metrics**

Understanding how the virus is spreading in our community helps LTCS anticipate how we may see the virus in our schools. In the 2020-2021 school year, La Tierra noticed community transmission does not always mirror the prevalence of COVID-19 cases in our school and vice versa. Community metrics are an important part of the decision-making process for determining when and how to implement health and safety protocols. However, it is not the only metric or data point that LTCS will rely on. Community metrics are only one of many considerations.

CDC recommends the use of two community measures to determine the level of risk of transmission: total number of new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days, and percentage of nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs), including RT-PCR tests, that are positive during the last 7 days.

Indicator	Low Transmission Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days	0 - 9	10 - 49	50 - 99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days	<5.0%	5.0% - 7.9%	8.0% - 9.9%	≥10.0%

**Instructional Models**

Previously, La Tierra’s instructional models were tied to the community metrics and implemented school wide. For the 2021-2022 school year, the instructional models will

be tied to evidence of transmission of the virus in our school and recommendations from YCCHS. Additionally, changes to instructional models will be implemented in the smallest populations possible such as a classroom rather than school wide.

At this time, LTCS will be offering full In-Person learning for all students. All efforts will be made to keep all students coming on campus full time. This model means all students are attending their classes on campus. This model is what we might call “normal” pre-pandemic instruction.

**La Tierra will NOT be offering any form of Distance Learning at this time.** Any decision to move to an instructional model other than full in-person will be made in consultation with YCCHS and approved by the LTCS Governing Board. Below are possible triggers that may indicate a need to move to a Distance Learning Model.

**Possible Triggers:**

- Indication of COVID-19 spread in a school as evidenced by case investigations.
- Significant increase in community metrics indicating a high prevalence of COVID-19 in our community.
- Introduction of a COVID-19 variant that presents a high risk to our students and staff.
- Other unforeseen COVID-19 circumstances that pose a threat to the health and safety of our students and staff

### **3. HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES**

***Preventive Hygiene & Health Screenings*** Another essential category recommended by health care professionals involves health screenings and preventive hygiene which includes hand-washing, possible use of face coverings, and minimizing sharing of belongings. Coupled with physical distancing, these are the most effective strategies in containing COVID-19. Our goal is to prevent symptomatic children and adults from entering our campus. Student families will play a critical role in health screenings of students.

***Face Coverings*** Per a provision in the FY 2022 State of Arizona budget passed by the legislature and signed by the governor, LTCS will not require masks for the 2021-2022 school year. However, LTCS encourages students and staff to follow CDC guidelines regarding mask-wearing and be respectful of everyone's personal choice to wear a mask.

**Health Screenings** A critical way to keep COVID-19 off of our campuses is for students and staff to stay home if they are sick or have been exposed to COVID-19. Therefore, families must screen their children at home every morning prior to sending them to school. Screening for symptoms includes asking students how they feel, assessing if they are experiencing any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and taking the student's temperature. If a student is exhibiting any sign of illness consistent with COVID-19, the student and any siblings must be kept home. Families need to follow up with the school office for further direction on isolation, quarantine, and COVID-19 testing. LTCS will provide flexibility and support to students who are absent due to COVID-19 and will work with families to keep their student caught up in their class(es).

If any household member is exhibiting illness or symptoms consistent with COVID-19, families must keep their students home and call the school office for guidance. Additionally, if any household member is awaiting COVID-19 test results, all students in that family need to be kept home. This only applies if the household member is being tested due to illness or symptoms. This does not apply to situations where a household member may be routinely tested by an employer, school, or for travel requirements. If any household member tests positive for COVID-19, all students need to be kept home and the school office should be notified immediately to provide further guidance.

LTCS will also monitor for COVID-19 symptoms in students by doing visual screenings and sending any student who appears to be ill to the office. Additionally, health screening questions may be asked. Student temperatures may be taken in certain situations. This may include prior to departing for a field trip or prior to a school activity that requires increased student density. Students with a temperature of 101.4 degrees or higher will be sent home immediately.

**Hand & Respiratory Hygiene** LTCS students and staff will be encouraged to wash or sanitize their hands often throughout the day during the 2021-2022 school year. Not only is this an effective method to slow the spread of COVID-19, but it is also effective at preventing other illnesses that can become prevalent in our school. Students may be offered hand sanitizer by school staff at certain points throughout the school day, such as before and after lunch, before and after recess, upon returning from the restroom, and before using devices.

Additionally, LTCS will encourage proper respiratory etiquette. Covering coughs and sneezes are an important way to stop the spread of germs. Students will be encouraged or reminded to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and immediately throw used tissues away. If no tissue is available, students will be asked to

sneeze or cough into their elbow, not their hands. Students should wash or sanitize hands immediately after blowing their nose, sneezing, or coughing.

**Contact Tracing & Quarantine** When notified of a student or staff member who has tested positive for COVID-19, LTCS school administration will conduct a case investigation and will contact trace to identify any close contacts of the positive individual. Close contacts of a positive individual will be required to quarantine. School administration will provide quarantine guidance and timelines to students, families, and staff who are required to quarantine. This quarantine guidance will be based on the latest guidance provided by AZDHS in their “Release from Isolation and Quarantine” document. If guidance is provided from a public health agency, such as the CDC, AZDHS, or YCCHS, about previously infected individuals being excused from quarantine, LTCS will follow that guidance. LTCS will provide flexibility and support to students who are absent due to COVID-19 and will work with families to keep their student caught up in their class(es).

**Cleaning, Sanitizing, & Disinfecting** Guidelines from public health agencies encourage institutions to consider the important differences between cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting, and recommend the best chemicals to use and how to apply them. La Tierra’s plan includes frequent cleaning of high touch areas, daily sanitation measures, and deep cleanings as needed. We will continue to use the CDC guidelines, along with other occupational and environmental recommendations, to learn the safest and most current practices in school facilities. Classroom staff will continue to be provided sanitizer and clean rags to sanitize desks and high touch areas periodically during the school day.

**Ventilation** LTCS will improve ventilation as much as possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. Below are a few ventilation strategies from the CDC:

- Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
- Ensure Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) settings are maximizing ventilation.
- Filter and/or clean the air in the school by improving the level of filtration with air filters in every classroom.

**Physical Barriers** CDC no longer recommends physical barriers such as plexiglass to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Use of plexiglass in the classroom will be optional at the teacher’s discretion for classroom management and/or layout purposes.

**Training, Communication, & Coordination** LTCS's operations plan will only be successful if it has clear expectations set out for its community, a structure that is sustainable, and the flexibility to adapt to changing realities. The first step is targeting communication to the community on how to protect ourselves and others by informing everyone about what guidelines must be followed. In addition to existing communications channels, we will continue to display hygiene-related signage in key areas such as the main access points to campus, bathrooms and common areas on campus.

Once communication mechanisms are in place, more detailed instruction and training will be implemented throughout the community, prior to and at the start of school. Our cleaning staff have been trained on new measures of reducing and eliminating germs, and our teachers and staff have been trained on sanitizing classroom space and shared objects. Additionally, our students will be trained on maintaining physical distance and upholding personal health hygiene. Everyone will have a role to play and will be an integral part of school safety.

As guidance is continually updated by public health agencies, we will modify this document to reflect the updates. Any changes that may be substantial and/or controversial will be communicated clearly to families. Any changes to mitigation measures or instructional models will be clearly communicated to families.

#### **4. OTHER CAMPUS CONSIDERATIONS**

**Grade Level Pods** In order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 if a breakout occurs, LTCS is implementing multi-grade level pods. Kindergarten through 3rd grade students will be in one pod, and 4th grade through 7th grade students will be in a second pod. These pods will be together before school and during recesses and lunch. Pods will not mix throughout the school day.

**Visitors and Volunteers** While LTCS relies on and encourages volunteers and visitors in our schools, unvaccinated adults pose the biggest threat to students, especially those who are not eligible for the vaccine. For the 2021-2022 school year, LTCS will continue to allow visitors and volunteers on campus in a limited capacity. They must check in at the front office and follow all instructions given by the school administration.

**Aftercare** The Aftercare Program will be offered for LTCS students for the 2021-22 school year. This program goes from 3:30-5:10 and costs \$10 per day per student. Since this program is not part of the school day, students will be highly encouraged to wear masks since multiple grade levels will be mixing together.

**Social Emotional Support Considerations** At LTCS, social and emotional supports have always been a critical component of our education vision. Our highly qualified counselor and other dedicated staff are ready to help students with social and emotional needs. However, as families, staff and community members face many new challenges throughout this pandemic, LTCS is very aware of the uncertainty and trauma that COVID-19 is creating for our students and staff. We believe that social and emotional learning and support (SEL) should be a top priority.

In the 2020-2021 school year, LTCS staff noticed many social emotional needs of our students including anxiety, grief, fear, self regulation, and difficulty adjusting to on-campus procedures. Therefore, LTCS will have our Counselor on campus 2 days per week to see students during the 2021-22 school year.

La Tierra Community School and its leaders view social and emotional learning as the process through which students and adults:

- Understand and manage emotions
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Handle challenging situations constructively

We are examining our current specifically designed programs to help support social and emotional learning for our students, educators and families. Integrating these practices can occur by:

- Promoting feelings of autonomy, relatedness, and competence
- Providing opportunities to practice recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions
- Taking advantage of teachable moments that occur naturally throughout the school day.

Our students will be returning to school with a range of experiences from throughout the pandemic. We want to acknowledge that not all students are coming back with the same feelings and emotions and will have various issues and coping abilities.

**Technology Considerations** When technology is used in the classroom, LTCS teachers will ensure that proper cleaning procedures are taken for Chromebooks used throughout the school day. If LTCS is required to go to remote learning or if a classroom must

quarantine, the school will provide devices for students to use at home. These devices must be returned to school without damage or the family will be charged for repairs or a new Chromebook.

**Attendance Considerations** LTCS must follow state guidelines regarding daily attendance taking for the 2021-2022 school year because school funding is tied to student enrollment in the first 100 days and student attendance for the entire school year. Research shows that attendance at school is directly linked with academic success. Plans for supporting student attendance include contacting families with a history of chronic absenteeism at the start of the school year and identifying and providing solutions to barriers for attending school.

Although attendance is extremely important, students must stay home if the student or a household member:

- exhibits symptoms of COVID-19
- is awaiting test results
- has tested positive
- is quarantining due to being a close contact.