

**Gaston County Schools
Board of Education
Tuesday, July 27, 2021
Special Meeting
5:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

The Gaston County Board of Education met in the Board Room, 943 Osceola Street, Gastonia, NC in a special meeting on Tuesday, July 27, 2021 for the purpose of discussing the “StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12)” Update. Additionally, the meeting was live on Spectrum Cable Channel 21 and the Gaston County Board of Education YouTube page. Those Board Members in attendance were: Chairman Jeff K. Ramsey, Vice Chairman Dot Cherry (joined by zoom), Kevin Collier, Justin Davis, Lee Dedmon, Dot Guthrie, Steve Hall, Robbie Lovelace and Brent Moore (joined by zoom).

Additional attendees include: Superintendent Dr. W. Jeffrey Booker, Attorney Sonya McGraw (joined by zoom), Associate Superintendents Melissa Balknight and Gary Hoskins, Chief Communications Officer Todd Hagans (joined by zoom), Administrative Assistant Andrea Stephens and Board Clerk Dana Luoto.

Chairman Ramsey called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

Agenda Adoption – Action

The Board considered Agenda Adoption – Action

Motion to adopt the Agenda as presented was made by Mr. Lee Dedmon; seconded by Mr. Justin Davis motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

Public Comment – Information

Melissa Lunch
3806 Dallas High Shoals Hwy.
Dallas, NC 28034
RE: Long COVID in kids

Ava Clarkson
114 Leeper Avenue
Belmont, NC 28012
RE: Retire the Red Raider Mascot

Jasmine Clarkson
114 Leeper Avenue
Belmont, NC 28012
RE: Retire the Red Raider Mascot

Laura Sexton
831 Bermuda Avenue
Gastonia, NC 28054
RE: RE: Retire the Red Raider Mascot
Although Ms. Sexton completed the Request to Speak Form, she did not appear at the meeting.

Lori Peabody
2406 Emily Drive
Belmont, NC 28012
RE: On campus COVID testing/Mask Mandate

Michael Crisp
3105 John Calvin Court
Stanley, NC 28164
RE: Mask Mandate

Jason Payseur
3327 Beaty Road
Gastonia, NC 28056
RE: Mask Mandate

Tyler Lee
145 New Bern Street
Charlotte, NC 28209
RE: Mask Mandate

Stephanie Franks
1437 Georgetowne Drive
Gastonia, NC 28054
RE: Mask Mandate

Jessica Higgins
1700 Old Spencer Mtn. Road
Dallas, NC 28034
RE: Mask Mandate

Cara Cortazzo
1551 Reflection Pointe Blvd.
Belmont, NC 28012
RE: Mask Mandate

Sierra Hall
1304 S. York Road
Gastonia, NC 28052
RE: Keeping masks for students

Jennifer Morales
101 Creek Side Drive
Mt. Holly, NC 28120
RE: Mask Mandate

Shannon Williams
178 N. Main Street
Mt. Holly, NC 28120
RE: Mask Mandate

Andy Anders
400 Dale Avenue
Gastonia, NC 28052
RE: Mask Mandate

Derek Summey
1933 Dallas Stanley Hwy.
Stanley, NC 28164
RE: Mask Mandate

COVID-19 - "StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12)" Update - Information

Chairman Ramsey recognized Superintendent Booker who reported that on Tuesday, August 10, 2021 both early colleges will open and Monday, August 23, 2021 is the first day of school. We will return to a daily operation of schools — all grade levels will operate five days per week. We will continue with elementary school starting at 7:30 a.m. and middle and high school starting at 8:30 a.m. Superintendent Booker reviewed updates to the StrongSchools NC Public Health Toolkit (K-12).

Superintendent Booker introduced Mr. Steve Eaton, Public Health Director Gaston County Department of Health & Human Services and Ms. Angela King Communicable Disease Nurse Gaston County Department of Health & Human Services. Mr. Eaton and Ms. King presented a PowerPoint on COVID-19 Update StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12). Discussion followed.

(View PowerPoint)

Motion

The motion was made by Mr. Justin Davis; seconded by Mr. Steve Hall that the Board
**Make mask wearing in Gaston County Schools optional on campus beginning
August 1, 2021**

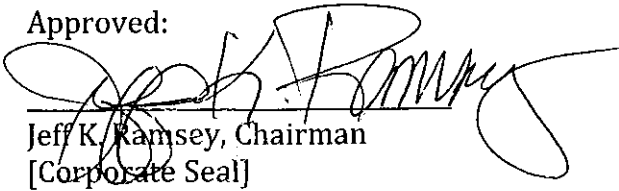
After discussion, a vote was taken and motion to approve the item as presented carried
unanimously. (9-0)

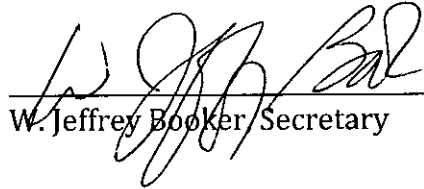
Adjournment

All business having been conducted, Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Lee Dedmon;
seconded by Mr. Steve Hall; motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

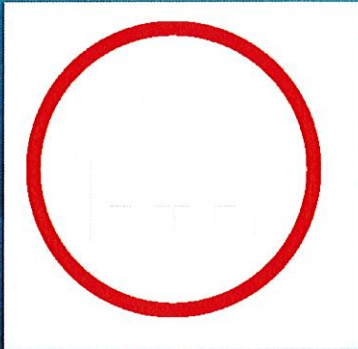
The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Approved:


Jeff K. Ramsey, Chairman
[Corporate Seal]


W. Jeffrey Booker, Secretary

Date Approved: 8/16/2021



Gaston County Schools

COVID-19 Update StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12)

Presentation to the Board of Education

July 27, 2021



Monday, August 23

(Early Colleges – August 10)



Gaston County Schools

Daily Operation of Schools

Return to Monday through Friday schedule

- All grade levels operate five days per week.

2021-2022 School Start Times

- Elementary School: 7:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
- Middle and High School: 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Gaston County Schools

Introduction and Overview

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor's Office have provided information and guidance for school districts.

- [Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#)

StrongSchoolsNC
Public Health Toolkit (K-12)

INTERIM GUIDANCE
Originally Published June 2020 • Updated July 21, 2021
Effective Date: July 30, 2021

Gaston County Schools

StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit Update (k-12)

- **Provisions of the Toolkit are effective July 30 at 5:00 p.m.**

Below is a summary of the major updates to the Toolkit from the previous version:

- Each section of the Toolkit has been organized into categories that prioritize implementation of the strategies that have been shown to be most effective in lowering the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread in school sessions and school activities:
 - Strategies that **SHOULD** be implemented by all schools. These are strategies that, if not implemented, create conditions of high risk for COVID-19 exposure and spread. **NCDHHS strongly advises that school leaders adopt all the strategies in the SHOULD sections.**
 - Strategies that school leaders **COULD CONSIDER** adopting. These are strategies to provide additional layers of prevention and that, if implemented, will further reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread.

StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12) Interim Guidance • Published June 2020; Updated July 21, 2021

Gaston County Schools

StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit Update (k-12)

- Added information on offering and promoting COVID-19 vaccination.
- Revised to emphasize the COVID-19 prevention strategies most important for in-person learning for K-12 schools - most importantly, promoting vaccinations and proper and consistent use of face coverings.
- Added language on the importance of offering in-person learning, regardless of whether all the prevention strategies can be implemented at the school. For example, students should not be excluded from full-time, in-person learning to accommodate physical distancing. Instead, other prevention strategies, in particular consistent and proper masking, should be used.

StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12) Interim Guidance • Published June 2020; Updated July 21, 2021

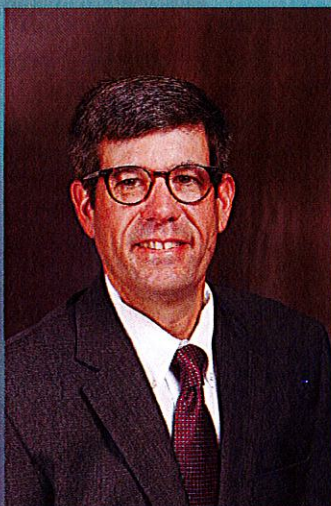
Gaston County Schools

StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit Update (k-12)

- Updated to align with guidance for fully vaccinated people.
- Added additional guidance on testing strategies
- Added modified quarantine guidance for students after a close contact in which both people were wearing masks.
- Removed references to options for Plans A, B, and C.
- Removed reference to remote learning requirement.

StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12) Interim Guidance • Published June 2020; Updated July 21, 2021

Gaston County Schools

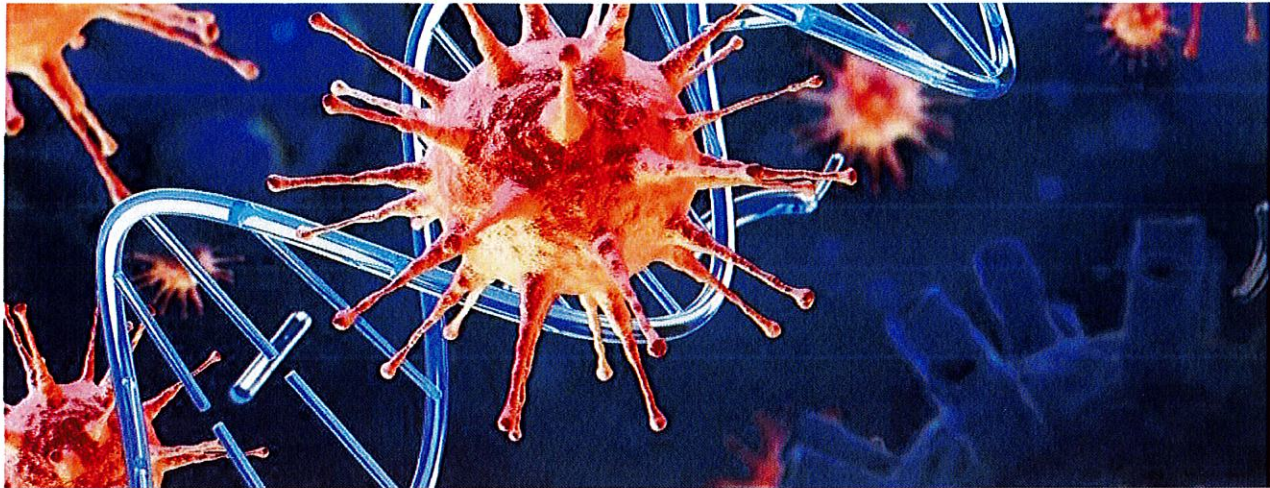


Steve Eaton, MPH

Public Health Director
Gaston County Department of Health
and Human Services

- Partners with GCS leadership.
- Maintains regular communication with GCS leadership.

Gaston County Schools



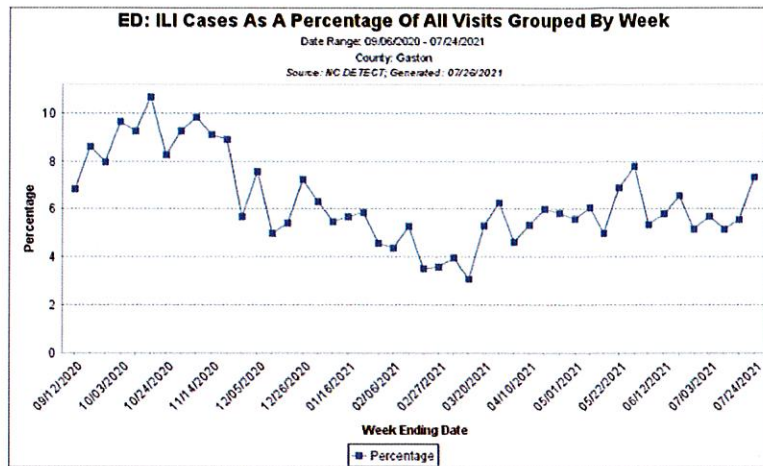
KEY METRICS - COVID-19

GASTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
JULY 27, 2021

SUMMARY OF KEY METRICS

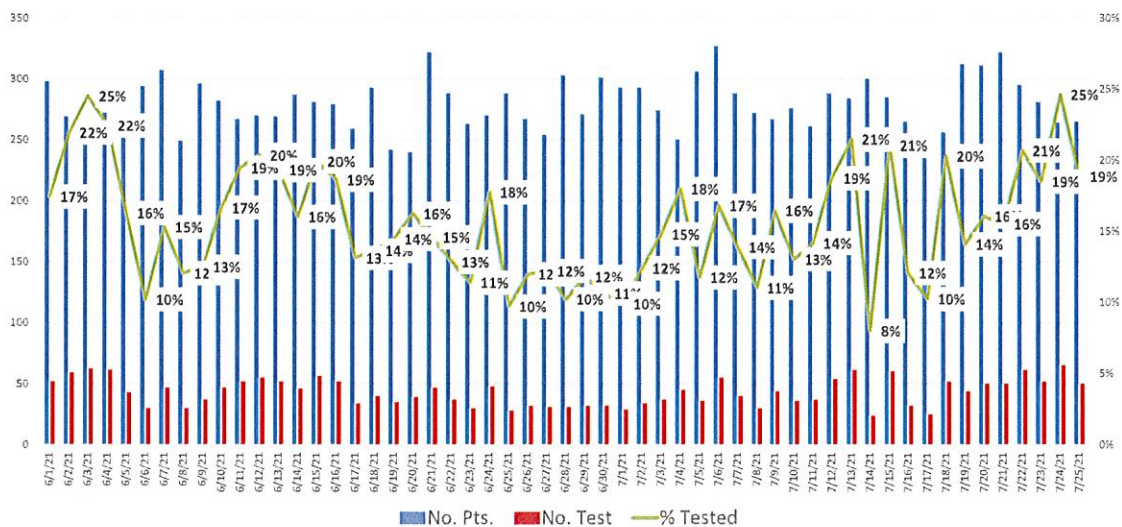
Goal	Note	7/19/21	7/26/21
○ Decline or steady sustained level of influenza like illnesses	<i>This indicator is obtained from NC DETECT, and had a decrease in the most recent week.</i>	—	×
○ Downward trajectory or sustained leveling of COVID-like Syndromic cases over 14 days	<i>The indicator for this measure is the percentage of ED visits resulting in a COVID-19 test. This has remained level in the most recent week.</i>	✓	✓
○ Downward trajectory or sustained leveling of cases over 14 days	<i>The number of cases has increased over the past 14 days.</i>	✓	×
○ Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percentage of total tests over 14 days	<i>Gaston County Percent of Positive cases increased over the most recent 14 days.</i>	✓	×
○ Downward trajectory of hospitalizations over 14 days	<i>Hospitalization levels had a significant increase in the most recent 14 days.</i>	✓	×
<div> ✓ Goal Achieved — Trending Towards Goal × Trending Away from Goal </div>			

PERCENTAGE OF ED VISITS WITH ILI – GASTON COUNTY



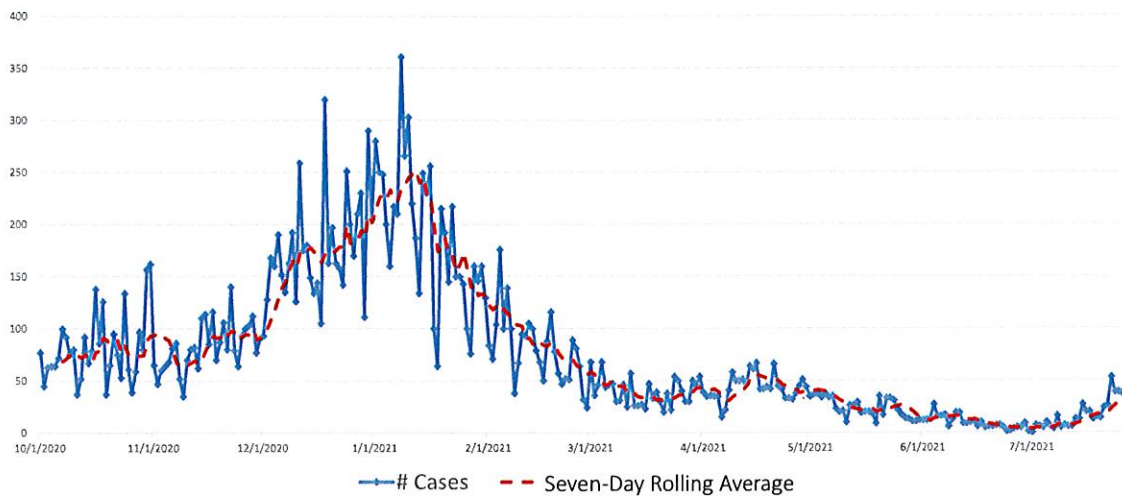
Source: NC DETECT, ILI Syndrome Line List

COVID-19 TESTING IN THE ED



Source: CaroMont Health

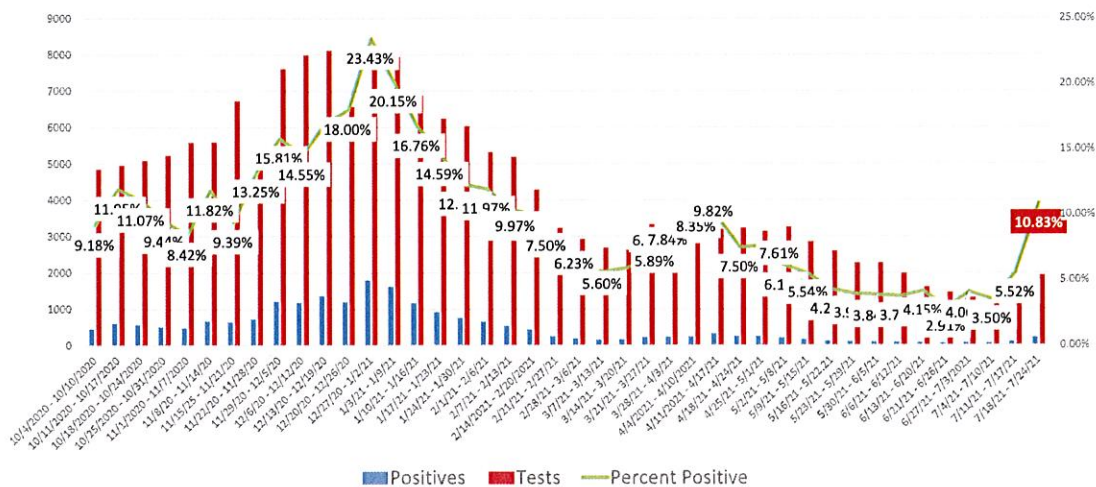
GASTON COUNTY COVID-19 CASES BY DATE REPORTED



Source: NC EDSS

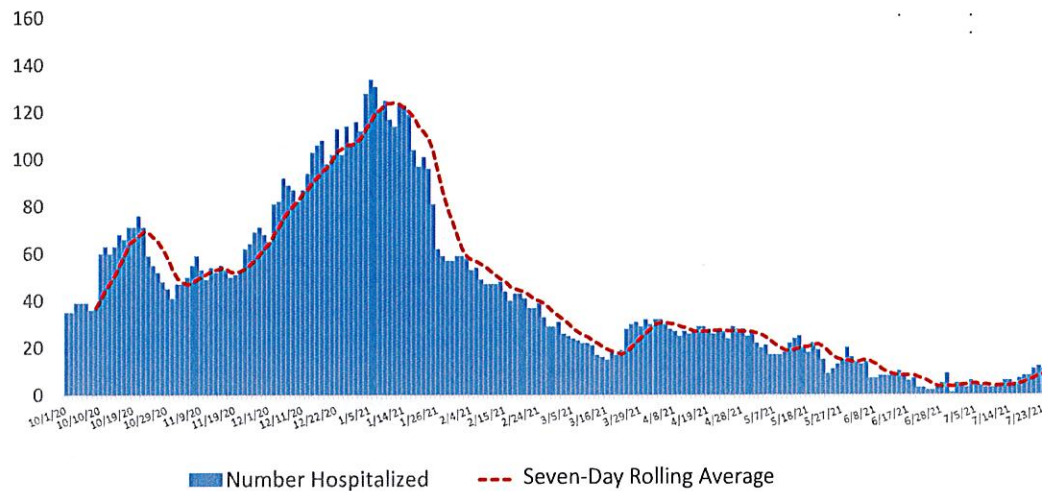
13

PERCENT OF POSITIVE TESTS, BASED ON COLLECTION DATE



Source: NC EDSS; Updated each Monday. Some tests from the most recent week may be missing, previous weeks will be updated as information is received.

GASTON COUNTY COVID-19 HOSPITALIZATIONS

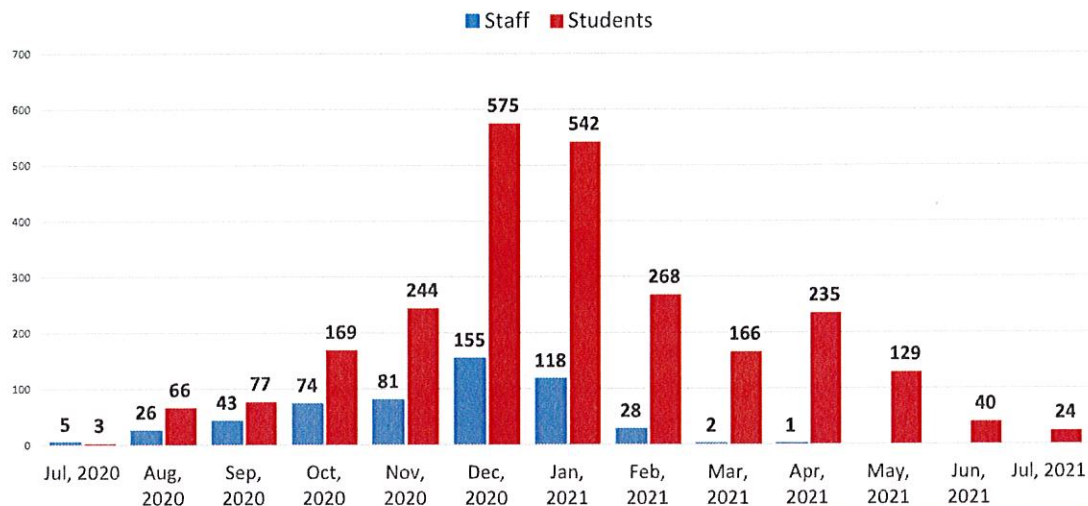


Source: Gaston County DHHS

COVID-19 GASTON COUNTY SCHOOL CASES AND CONTACTS

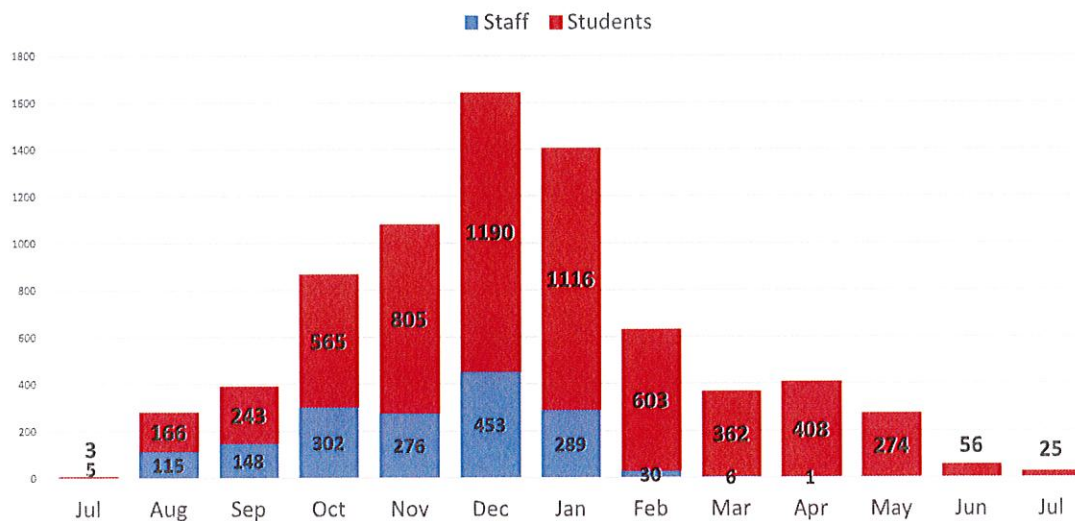


ALL CASES – FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS



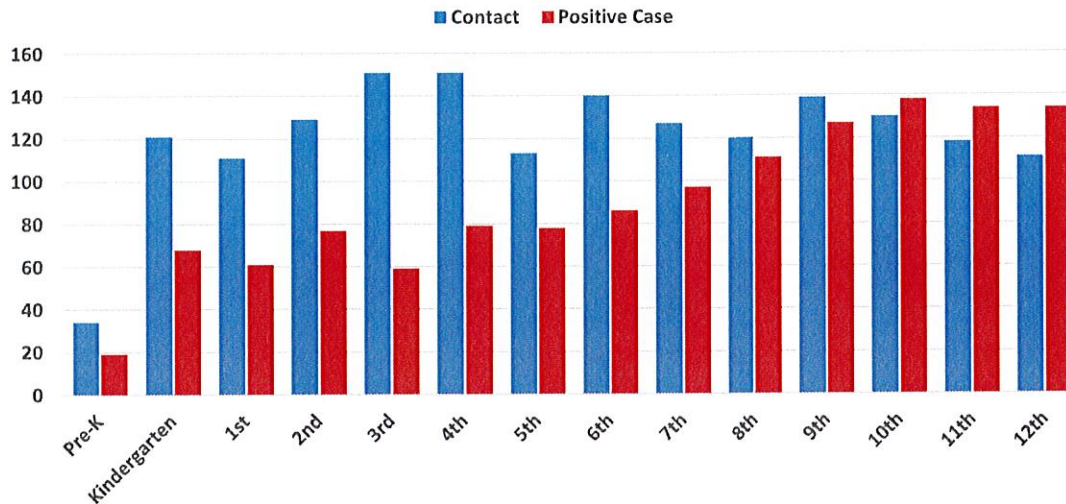
Source: Gaston County DHHS, 7/23/21. This represents only positive case, but does include cases in private and charter schools

ALL CASES AND CONTACTS, FACULTY STAFF AND STUDENTS



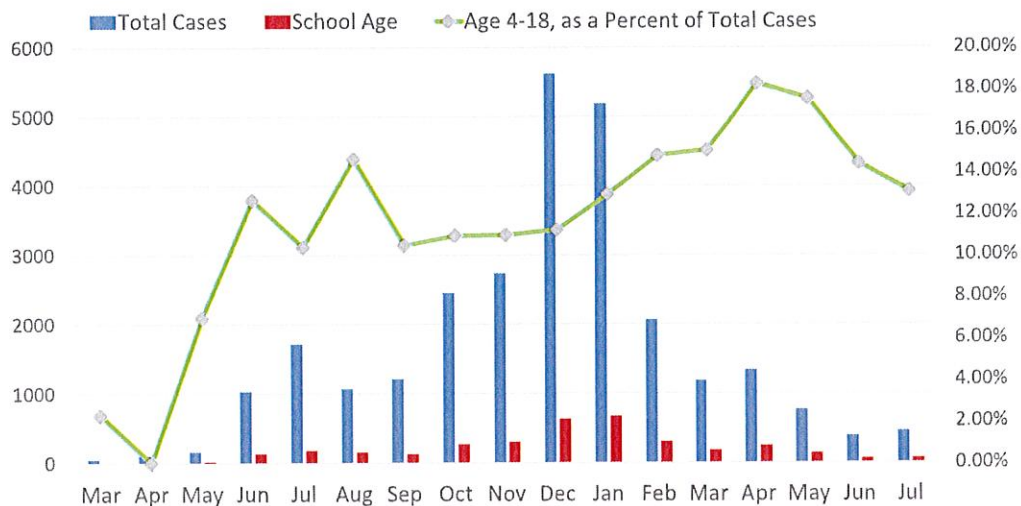
Source: Gaston DHHS, 7/23/21. Beginning April 12, 2021, Gaston County Schools assumed responsibility for all contact tracing and that data is omitted from this report. This report may include cases from private and charter schools.

ALL CASES AND CONTACTS, GRADE LEVEL



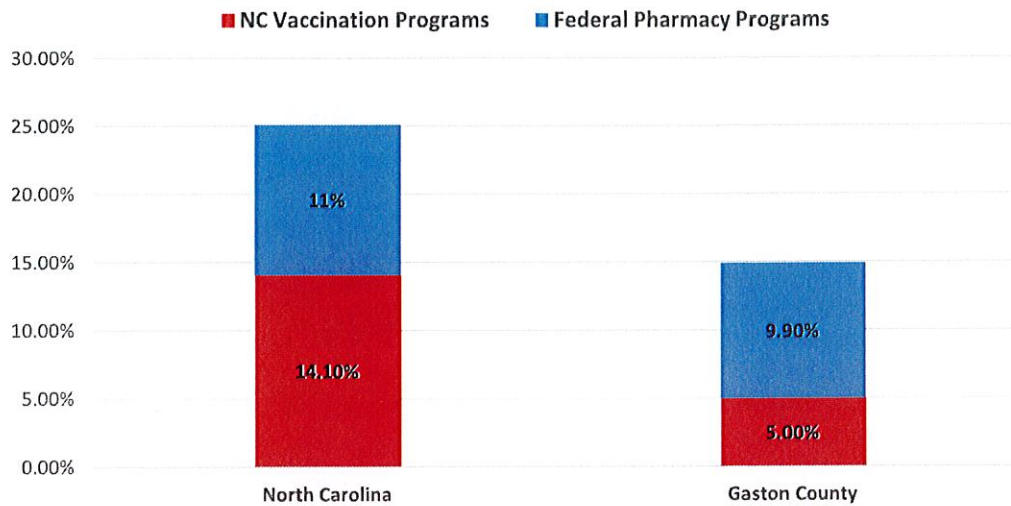
Source: Gaston DHHS, 8/1/20 - 7/23/21. Beginning April 12, 2021, Gaston County Schools assumed responsibility for all contact tracing and that data is omitted from this report. This report may include cases from private and charter schools.

AGES 4 – 18; PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CASES



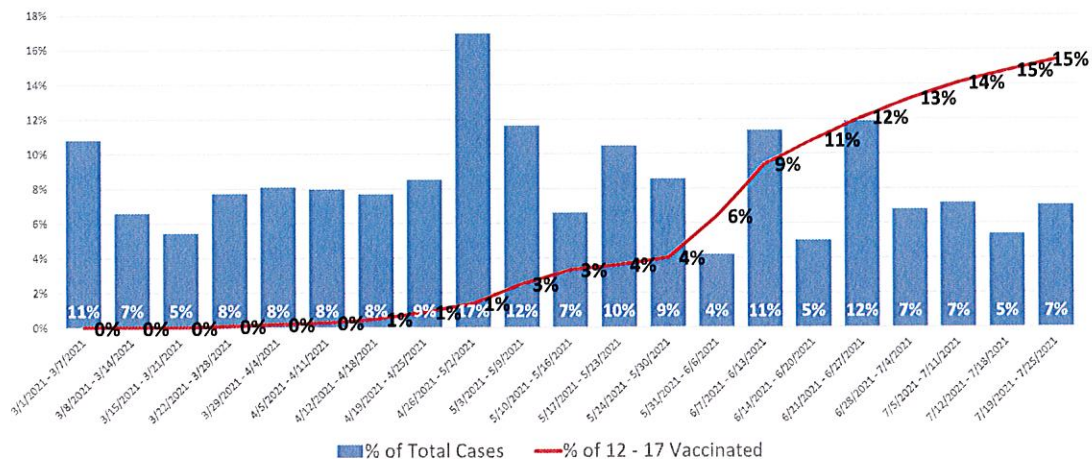
Source: NC EDSS; July 23, 2021, This report include all cases of Gaston County residents between the ages of 4 and 18, regardless of school attended.

VACCINATION RATES, AGES 12 - 17



Source: NC DHHS; July 23, 2021

AGES 12 – 17 VACCINATION RATES AND CASE COUNTS



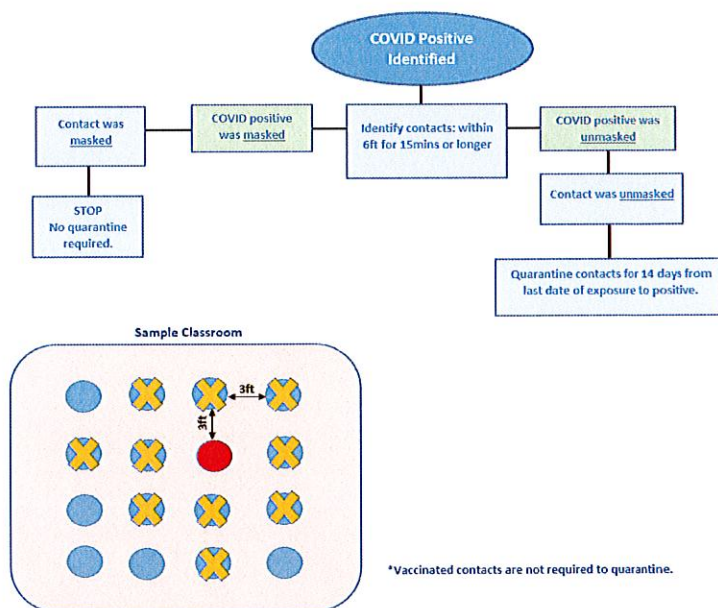
PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATION

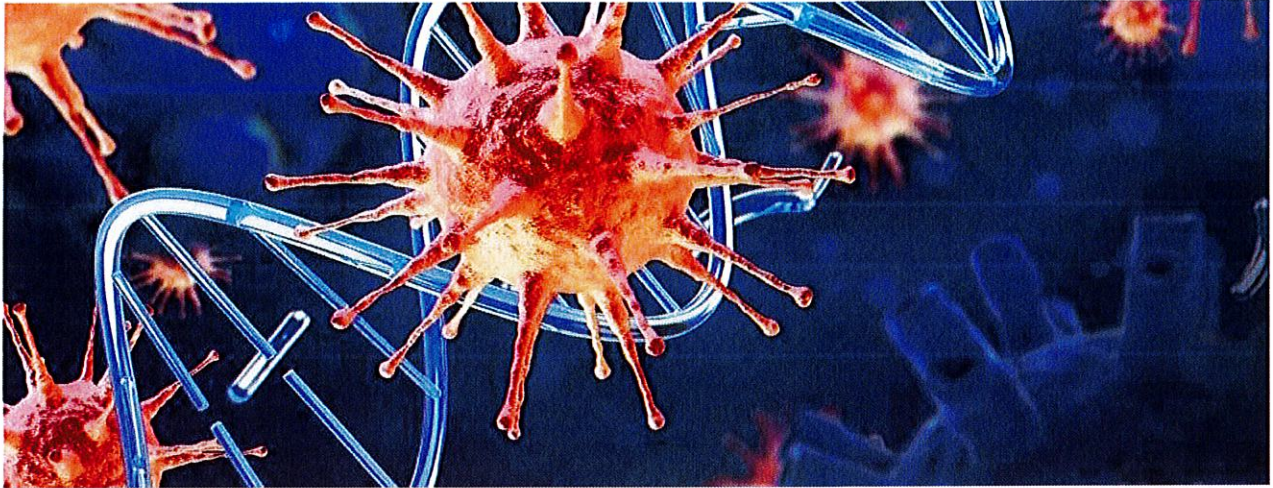
Adhere to the Strong Schools NC Toolkit and Guidance Updated 7.21.21

- Require all children and staff (K-8) to wear face coverings when indoors
- Require all passengers and staff to wear face coverings on buses, vans, and other group school transportation (Per CDC Order)
- Ensure face coverings are worn indoors by all individuals *not vaccinated*
 - Grades 9-12, workers, teachers, guests, and other adults.
- Follow physical distancing protocols outlined in the Strong Schools NC Toolkit

Basis for Public Health Recommendation

- Gaston County's low vaccination rate (36% fully vaccinated)
- Current local spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant
- Gaston County's increasing positivity rate which is now at 11% and expected to increase
- Increase in daily new cases





KEY METRICS - COVID-19

GASTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
JULY 27, 2021

StrongSchoolsNC **Public Health Toolkit (K-12)**

INTERIM GUIDANCE

Originally Published June 2020 • Updated July 21, 2021

Effective Date: July 30, 2021

Gaston County Schools

BUS TRANSPORTATION



Gaston County Schools

Bus Transportation

Local education leaders and schools should follow the guidelines below and the [CDC Transportation Order](#) for their transportation vehicles (e.g., buses, vans).

During school transportation: [CDC's Order](#) applies to all public transportation conveyances, including school buses. Regardless of the mask policy at school, all passengers and drivers should wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in CDC's Order.

Gaston County Schools

Conclusions

Operational Flexibility and Planning for Different Scenarios

- The Toolkit has been updated to provide school leaders with greater flexibility in implementing the layered prevention strategies based on current COVID-19 trends and updated CDC guidance. School leaders should continue to consult with local public health officials for input on community transmission and vaccine uptake to make local decisions.
- School leaders should continue to maintain plans for different potential scenarios depending on what restrictions are deemed necessary by state or local public health leaders at any time in the school year to control the spread of the disease.

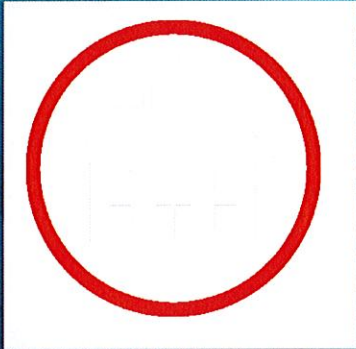
StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12) Interim Guidance • Published June 2020; Updated July 21, 2021

Gaston County Schools

QUESTIONS and DISCUSSION



Gaston County Schools



Winston County Schools

COVID-19 Update StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12)

Presentation to the Board of Education

July 27, 2021