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Pelham Union Free School District

FTIP Reopening Advisory Task Force Report

March 23, 2021

I. Introduction

Pelham Union Free School District's ("Pelham Schools") policies and protocols for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic are rooted in continuing the Pelham Schools' vital mission of providing an education in a safe environment for its students, teachers and staff, as well as the entire Pelham community who interact with students, teachers and staff on a daily basis.

Pelham schools have been operating since September 2020 under a 50% hybrid model, where students have in-person school 2-2.5 days per week. A fully virtual option is also available. Given declining community infection rates, increasing vaccinations, and the acceptance of a new distancing standard of 3 feet by the scientific community, there is an opportunity to return students to full time in person instruction this spring in a safe manner.

Pelham's Reopening Advisory Task Force ("Task Force") was created to solicit the widest array of feedback from Pelham community members from various backgrounds, including but not limited to the medical/infectious disease, mental health, legal, education and policy making professions. The role of the Task Force was to generate discussion and come to a consensus, and to submit its findings and recommendations to the District and the Board of Education on how to bring Pelham children back to school in an environment that is safe, and which mirrors, as much as possible, the educational and co-curricular environment that existed for students prior to the advent of COVID-19. The Task Force also analyzed the social and emotional impact of the return to school for students, teachers and staff, including the unique challenges relating to students who elect to be taught in the fully virtual modality; while recognizing the need to adhere to appropriate laws, regulations, orders, and guidelines relating to COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible.

II. Background

A. Task Force Committee Members

The Task Force members represent all community constituencies, including administrators, faculty, staff, and community members from all of the Pelham schools, as well as those representing the varying interests of having students return to fully in-person instruction, remain in the current hybrid model, and those who prefer fully virtual. The members include:

Name	Title
Dr. Cheryl Champ	Superintendent
Dr. Steven Garcia	Assistant Superintendent for CPI
Jim Hricay	Assistant Superintendent for Business
Julia Chung	Assistant Superintendent for PPS
John Condon	Director of Facilities
Mark Berkowitz	PMHS Principal
Lynn Sabia	PMS Principal
Sean Llewellyn	PMS Assistant Principal
Susan Gilbert	Colonial Principal
Trisha Fitzgerald	Hutchinson Principal
Jeannine Carr	Prospect Hill Principal
Farid Johnson	Siwanoy Principal
Dr. Tom Callahan	Director of Math and Science
Dr. Maria Thompson	Director of Humanities
Alex Wolff	Public Information Officer
John Sebalos	Director of Technology
Gail Sider	PUFSD Teacher

Scott Brown	PUFSD Counselor
Mark Finegan	PMHS Teacher, Teachers Association President
Christina Viggiano	Hutchinson Teacher
Laura Hendrie	Colonial Teacher
Lisa Arbelaez	Siwanoy Teacher
Janet Hoynes	Prospect Hill Teacher
Rachel Pixley	Pelham Middle School Teacher
Jessica Waters	Pelham Memorial High School Teacher
Dr. Tricia Joseph	Pelham Middle School
Kristin Quintano	PMHS Social Worker
Dr. Kusum Mathews	Doctor, COVID researcher, Hutchinson/PMS Parent
Dr. Jason D'Amore	Vice Chair Emergency Medicine Jacobi Medical Center
Dr. Tracy Breen	Doctor
Kristen Burke, Co-facilitator	Colonial Parent, Attorney, Town Council
Erin Ginsburg	PMS/Colonial Parent, Communications Professional
Stephanie Otero	Hutchinson Parent, Service Industry

Cheri Pitamber	Hutchinson Parent, Social Worker specializing in psychiatry and behavioral health
Alexandra Drinkwine	PMHS/Hutchinson Parent, Pre-school educator
Jessyka Calzolaio	Prospect Hill Parent, School Administrator
Theresa Pignone	Prospect Hill Parent, Reading Specialist
Kevin Ritchie	Siwanoy Parent, business owner and former member of U.S. military
Tara Weishaupl	Siwanoy Parent, AmEx Operations
Jackie DeAngelis	PMS Parent, EVP for healthcare consulting and communications company
Dr. Tiffany Hebert	PMHS/PMS Parent Associate Professor, Department of Pathology, Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Laura Caruso	PMHS Parent, Executive Director, Pelham Together
Leah Tahbaz	Member, Pelham Board of Education

B. Meeting Dates

The Task Force met virtually on the following dates/times:

- 2/23/21 5:00-6:30 PM
- 3/2/21 5:00-6:30 PM
- 3/9/21 5:00-6:30 PM (included break-out sessions)
- 3/16/21 5:00-6:30 PM (included break-out sessions)
- 3/23/21 5:00-6:30 PM (voluntary meeting to finalize Report)

Minutes for all meetings can be found on the District’s FTIP Planning [webpage](#).

Break-out groups included discussions in the following substantive areas:

- Surveillance and Metrics to guide phase-in and monitoring of success
- Elementary Lunch
- Secondary Lunch
- Supporting teachers with managing in-person and virtual students
- Mental health and wellbeing of fully virtual students
- Mental health and wellbeing of in-person students

Notes from those sessions can be found [here](#).

III. Summary of Task Force Findings

During the course of its multiple meetings, the Task Force engaged in an extensive review of all relevant information so as to consider various factors for reopening for instruction full time in-person (hereinafter “FTIP”), including the holistic health and safety of the students and staff, the delivery of core curriculum in an equitable manner, and the alignment of COVID-related requirements, guidelines, and scientific research. In doing so, the Task Force reviewed and considered the following:

- The relevant local, state and federal guidelines setting forth the parameters by which schools must adhere;
- The relevant scientific studies relating the health and safety of children in a return to the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Input from the various Task Force experts, including those in the medical, mental health and infectious disease fields, regarding the health and safety of children in the classroom, as well as the mental health and well-being of students and staff in and out of the classroom;
- Input from District administrators relating to various mitigation steps currently being used, as well as the options and limitations of bringing Pelham children back to school for FTIP instruction; and
- Input from teachers regarding their preference to provide instruction to students FTIP.

In light of all of the feedback received, the Task Force finds the following:

1. Public health data indicates that all Pelham elementary schools can safely allow for the return of all students FTIP with the various mitigation steps set forth below being in place and adhered to rigorously, including 3 feet of distancing between students
2. Public health data indicates that the High School (H.S.) and Middle School (M.S.) students can return to school for FTIP instruction, however, at the time of the writing of this Report, the facilities do not allow for the return of all students because more than half of classrooms cannot

make the 3 feet distancing requirement at full student capacity. Depending on the number of H.S. and M.S. students who want to return for FTIP this spring, the district can either bring them all back (if the number is low enough), or will consider a modified (more robust) hybrid model that brings students back for more days of in-person instruction each week, while allowing for 3 foot distancing. This challenge will need to be addressed rigorously in fall reopening planning so that all students may return to FTIP.

3. The District should allow for a fully-virtual (hereinafter “FV”) option for those who have a medical need that requires such. Students who elect to return to FTIP at the elementary level or who are in the modified hybrid at the H.S. level should not be permitted to attend virtually except in cases of mild student illness/students experiencing COVID symptoms (per the District daily screening), or students that are under a COVID-related quarantine order.

Sections VII. and VIII. below set forth the Task Force’s recommendations with respect to mitigation strategies to be continued and/or imposed, as well supportive steps to be taken in returning FTIP for the elementary level and under FTIP or the modified hybrid for the H.S. and M.S.

IV. Relevant Guidance Relating to Pelham Schools

At the time of this Report, the guidelines set forth below were in effect, and influenced the Task Force’s findings and recommendations for reopening instruction to FTIP.

A. CDC Guidelines Allowing for 3 Feet Physical Distance in Schools

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its K-12 school guidance to reflect the latest science on physical distance between students in classrooms. The CDC now recommends that, with universal masking, students should maintain a distance of at least 3 feet in classroom settings. The CDC has updated its operational strategy to say:

- In elementary schools, the CDC recommends all students remain at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal — regardless of whether community transmission is low, moderate, substantial, or high.
- In middle and high schools, the CDC also recommends students should be at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal and in communities where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial.
- Middle school students and high school students should be at least 6 feet apart in communities where transmission is high, if cohorting[1] is not possible. This recommendation is because COVID-19 transmission dynamics are different in older students – that is, they are more likely to be exposed to SARS-CoV-2 and spread it than younger children.

At the time of the writing of this report, Westchester County reports 3.8% positivity, 14-day average which is classified as low community transmission by the CDC.

The updated [*Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention*](#) is part of the CDC's existing resources for K-12 schools to open and remain open for in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the release of the Operational Strategy on February 12, 2021, the CDC has continually reviewed the evolving evidence on SARS-CoV-2 transmission in K-12 schools, as well as the latest science on the effectiveness of different prevention strategies within schools.

Three studies, published in a recent *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), also address the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in schools. Taken together, these studies build on evidence that physical distancing of at least 3 feet between students can safely be adopted in classroom settings where mask use is universal and other prevention measures are taken.

“CDC is committed to leading with science and updating our guidance as new evidence emerges,” said CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky. “Safe in-person instruction gives our kids access to critical social and mental health services that prepare them for the future, in addition to the education they need to succeed. These updated recommendations provide the evidence-based roadmap to help schools reopen safely, and remain open, for in-person instruction.”

The CDC continues to recommend at least 6 feet of distance:

- Between adults in the school building and between adults and students.
- In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
- When masks cannot be worn, such as when eating.
- During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.
- In community settings outside of the classroom.

According to the CDC, given the crucial services schools offer and the benefits of in-person learning, it is critical for K-12 schools to open and remain open for in-person instruction, as safely and as soon as possible. Schools should be the last settings to close because of COVID-19 and the first to reopen when they can do so safely. Working together, school leaders and community members can take actions to keep schools open for in-person learning by protecting students, teachers, and school staff where they live, work, learn, and play.

The CDC also highlights the need for prioritizing K-12 teachers and staff to receive the vaccine.

B. NYS DOH and NYSED Guidelines

Both the [New York State Department of Health \(NYS DOH\)](#) and [New York State Education Department \(NYSED\)](#) guidelines for reopening were prepared prior to the start of 2020-2021 academic year. While so much has changed regarding what we know and have learned scientifically, NYS DOH and NYSED, unlike the CDC, have yet to update their written guidelines. As such, the NYS DOH and NYSED policies with regard to health and safety requirements in K-12 schools for social distancing, face coverings, gatherings, operational activity (i.e. cohorting), movement and commerce, personal hygiene, screening and testing, and tracking and tracing remain in effect. In most cases, the Task Force advises the District to maintain these health and safety measures.

With respect to distancing in particular, however, the NYS DOH guidelines currently state the following:

appropriate social distancing means **six feet of space in all directions between individuals or use of appropriate physical barriers between individuals** that do not adversely affect air flow, heating, cooling, or ventilation, or otherwise present a health or safety risk. If used, physical barriers must be put in place in accordance with United States Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines, and may include strip curtains, cubicle walls, code compliant materials, or other impermeable divider or partition.

While the Task Force believes 3 feet is sufficient distancing (compared with the 6 feet required by the State), so long as the NYS DOH guidance remains in effect, Pelham schools shall need to continue to use physical barriers between students, such as the ones that are currently used on students' desks.

C. Executive Orders under the NYS Executive Law

Since the pandemic was first declared, Governor Cuomo has enacted numerous Executive Orders, most of which have been subsequently amended. One of these orders, in which the NYS DOH recently provided quarantine guidance that is particularly relevant to Pelham school opening FTIP (and especially as it relates to staff) states the following:

1. An individual is not required to quarantine after confirmed or suspected exposure to someone with COVID-19 if the following three criteria are all met:

- The individual is fully vaccinated, defined as at least two weeks after second dose of two-dose vaccine or two weeks after receiving a single-dose vaccine (J&J); AND
- The individual is within three months of having received the last dose in their vaccination series; AND
- They have been asymptomatic since the suspected/confirmed exposure.

2. Additionally, an individual who had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 within the previous three months and has recovered is not required to retest or quarantine if exposed during that three-month period.

3. Regardless of vaccination or prior infection, all individuals who are exposed to COVID-19 must monitor symptoms daily for 14 days, continue to wear face coverings and practice hand hygiene, and immediately self-isolate if symptoms appear.

There are also updated guidelines permitting larger gatherings. Though that was not a topic discussed by the Task Force, it could impact potential events at the school, such as prom and graduation.

D. NYS Covid-19 County Dashboard

For a successful return to FTIP, it is imperative that the District continue to vigorously monitor the [NYS COVID-19 Tracking Dashboard by County](#) to evaluate trends that might indicate an uptick of cases in our region and schools. Currently, Westchester County is at a 3.8% positivity rate over a rolling 14-day average. The use of surveillance testing within the District and tracking metrics in order to monitor trends to make decisions regarding whether to remain FTIP or potentially revert back to hybrid or even close, is discussed in further detail in Section VII.B. below.

E. Other Local Schools' Model

It is also important to note that several school districts in the tri-state area have either announced plans to reopen for FTIP instruction in the near future or have been open FTIP (some the entire school year). The Task Force believes it is helpful for Pelham schools to understand how those schools are laid out (i.e. 3 ft spacing v. 6 feet), and to monitor any outbreaks that may occur in such schools. See attached [chart](#).

V. Scientific Research Relating to In-Person Learning

The Task Force reviewed a number of scientific articles regarding the appropriate social distancing, as well as the rate of transmission in schools and among school-age children, in addition to the CDC and NYS DOH guidelines, in making its determination that Pelham elementary school children can come back FTIP and the H.S. and M.S. can have a more robust hybrid model.

A. 3 ft. v. 6 ft. Distancing Measure

As the CDC has already noted, based on the scientific data, schools can safely reopen FTIP so long as 3 feet is maintained to the extent possible, along with other safety measures in place,

most especially wearing appropriate face coverings. One such [study](#) found that there were no significant differences in K-12 student and staff COVID-19 case rates in Massachusetts public schools that implement ≥ 3 feet versus ≥ 6 feet of physical distancing between students, provided other mitigation measures, such as universal masking, are implemented.

The Task Force medical/infectious disease experts agree with this assessment. See Sections VI and VII below regarding additional recommendations for layered mitigation steps to ensure healthy and safe schools.

B. Lower Transmission Among Young Children and in Schools

While there is not a lot of scientific data on transmission among children and schools, there are [studies](#) that indicate children and schools play a limited role in transmission of the coronavirus. Studies also indicate that children are [less susceptible to infection than older adults](#). The studies also appear to indicate, however, that spread is greater at the secondary/high school level and that children 10 years old and older are more susceptible to COVID-19; although for children aged 18 and younger, even when symptomatic, the outcomes are often only mild illness.

The Task Force medical/infectious disease experts agree with this assessment. See Sections VI and VII below regarding additional recommendations for maintaining health and safety in our schools.

C. Negative Impact Relating to Remote Learning Environment

Prior to the formation of the FTIP Reopening Advisory Task Force, a number of concerned parents in the Pelham community came forward to express their concerns (in some cases, grave) with how they believe their child(ren) was/were being impacted by not being in school full-time. The Task Force discussed these issues at the first meeting. Many of the parents, teachers and mental health professionals on the Task Force echoed those concerns facing our community members, and acknowledged the various negative impacts remote education has had on our children, including but not limited to: perceived educational/academic decline, especially highlighted in the M.S. where some students are no longer putting on their videos and in some cases, are simply not showing up for virtual classes; mental health issues, such as isolation, stress, anxiety, and the concern that by not being in schools as often, such mental health issues may go undetected; the creation of [inequities in learning](#) due to lack of resources on the part of certain families (i.e. lack of computers, insufficient wi-fi, etc.); family stressors, such as working parents who cannot devote attention to virtual learning; children with special needs/IEPs/504 Plans not feeling that they are receiving the sufficient support services needed; and the constant screen time causing negative mental, emotional and physical impacts on our children.

The Task Force acknowledges these concerns and agrees that these are a significant basis for recommending FTIP instruction to the greatest extent practicable in a safe and healthy

environment. The Task Force also recognizes the need to continue supporting the mental and emotional well being of its students and staff as we transition students back to school FTIP, as well as for students who remain fully virtual. See Section VIII. below regarding its recommendations in these areas.

VI. Task Force Recommendations Relating to Proposed FTIP Reopening Plans

The Task Force supports the District’s current plans for bringing elementary students back to FTIP instruction and, depending on the number of students planning to return this spring, bringing H.S. and M.S. students back to FTIP instruction or to a modified hybrid instruction model that allows for more more days in school, as well as the option to allow students to be taught fully virtually, with the following recommendations. Please note that all schools will require masks and hand hygiene protocols, along with outfitting each classroom with an air purifier and box fan to increase ventilation.

A. Elementary Plan

1. Start date for elementary schools to begin FTIP for grades K-5 on April 12
 - Protects against post vacation “bump” in cases
 - Allows for more staff to be fully vaccinated
 - Warmer weather allows for better use of outdoor space
 - Allows time for furniture set-up and equipment distribution
2. Schedule for elementary schools will be as follows:
 - 8:30am: staggered arrival
 - 11:15am-12:15am: lunch
 - 2:40: staggered dismissal
 - 2:50pm: open office hours
 - School specific schedules are forthcoming
 - 12pm early release on Wednesdays will continue. There is still a need for teachers who will be continuing to teach virtually to prepare for those sessions.
3. Seating.

Seating will be 3 feet between each student, spaced out in various ways depending on the size of the room. In some cases, desks will be organized in a cluster of 3 . Tables with dividers may also be used (see photos below). The Task Force finds these options acceptable because doing this allows for maximization of space in some of the smaller classrooms. It also provides each child

with more personal space to move around. In case of an emergency, it would be very difficult for a student to safely exit the classroom with desks in rows.



a. Seating direction. There are studies that suggest that it is better to have children facing in the same direction; and having the seats in clusters would not permit that. According to Task Force medical experts, however, having more space between students (as would be the case here with clustered seating) trumps the benefits of having children face in the same direction.

b. Barriers. Physical plastic barriers will continue to be used, though with updated models to help children see through them better. While there is no hard evidence to date that shows barriers are effective in preventing the spread of coronavirus, the Task Force experts suggest they could not hurt, and at the least, they help in keeping a physical separation between children, especially at the elementary age.

c. 3 feet head-to-head/stem-to-stem. While questions have been raised about whether it would be better to have at least 3 feet between desks, Task Force medical experts have said that 3 feet between students head-to-head or stem-to-stem should be sufficient with the other mitigation precautions in place. The difference between desk-to-desk or head-to-head is a matter of just inches, and they believe would play only a negligible role in spreading the virus.

d. Mitigation steps. The use of well-fitting masks, open windows, good hand hygiene, will and must continue to be used in earnest. See Section VII. below.

4. Lunchtime

At least one study has shown that the greatest risk of spread in schools is during lunchtime, when masks are removed and talking amongst students takes place. Task Force medical experts expressed the same concern. Nonetheless, the Task Force believes eating in the classroom, even at just 3 ft distance with barriers, is the safest way to ensure children remain separated while eating. The Elementary Lunch Subcommittee of the Task Force has come up with the following recommendations:

- a. Elementary students will primarily eat at their desks during lunch, as was stated by Dr. Champ at the 3/10 BOE presentation. Gyms are simply not an option and eating outdoors is not a permanent solution because of space issues at schools such as Hutchinson, which is under construction, as well as the uncertainty with the weather. The principals believe children need a set routine.
- b. Could mean going outside on nice weather days, if that is an option for the school;
- c. Families will be reminded that there is the option for children to go home during lunch while accompanied by a guardian.
- d. Elementary classes will also consider staggering eating times within each classroom, as may be needed, especially in smaller classrooms (i.e. where there is 3 feet spacing). There will likely be staggered eating times based on the nature of how handwashing is managed with the limited facilities; more so now with all children being back in school.
- e. There will be a lot of discretion for principals and teachers in managing lunchtime, particularly depending on classroom size.
- f. At the recommendation of the Task Force, teachers should consider instituting quiet time, or activity time (e.g. possibly having the lunch monitor read a book, play music, audiobook, show and tell, etc.). Mrs. Carr will be sharing with the other schools all of the resources she has collected of possible activities to entertain the children during lunchtime.
- g. Must ensure the other mitigating factors remain in place, such as having the windows stay open, masks are put on right after eating, kids stay in their spaces behind barriers. These measures are key and need to be reinforced.

B. High School and Middle School Plans

At the time of the writing of this report, the District is still awaiting responses from a number of families regarding their preference for FTIP or FV. Once this data is received, the District can evaluate more fully all of the various options at the H.S. and the M.S. The District is aiming to

present a more in-depth plan for the H.S. and the M.S. at the April 7, 2021 Board of Education Meeting. With that said, the current plans (subject to change) include the following:

1. Phased in start. PMHS/PMS will begin phasing-in during the month of April dependent upon further assessment of capacity, as determined by survey responses. Right now the plan is that Grades 8 and 12 grades will return first; Grades 6 and 9 grades would be next; and Grades 7, 11 and 10 would follow--however, these staggered bands are subject to change depending on Regents exams and assessment exam schedules. It should be noted that students in grades that are not being brought back would remain in the current hybrid model, attending in-person on the days they normally would under the existing schedule.

2. Facilities constraints will impact the ability to open the H.S. and M.S. for FTIP in the case that all students want to return this spring:

- Small classrooms (50-65% cannot achieve 3 feet distance at 100% capacity).
- Room utilization is maxed out, so there is little flexibility and satellite classrooms are not viable.
- Additional space is needed for lunch during inclement weather since the cafeteria cannot seat all students, and the gyms are used for lunch overflow. The District is trying to obtain quotes on tents to have overflow space outdoors on bad-weather days.
- NYS assessments will be happening for grades 3-8—for M.S. students who opt-out, they may need to stay home during that period to allow space for those who elect to take the tests. More information will be forthcoming from principals regarding state assessments.

3. Schedule (Tentative). _____

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- 1st period start - 8:15am
 - 9th period end - 2:46pm
 - Academy 2:51-3:11 (in person/virtual)
 - 5-minute passing time between classes to reduce hallway density
 - 12pm early release on Wednesdays will continue

4. Lunch.

According to the Task Force Subcommittee on Secondary Lunch, assuming all students were back FTIP,[2] it would be difficult for students to use shields on bleachers, and auditorium seats would be uncomfortable to eat on. The Subcommittee further discussed the following:

- a. Space. Using current lunchroom areas (Cafeteria A, Cafeteria C, Blue Gym) provides seating for 134 middle school students. Alumni Hall is used for Science Research, since they cannot use their former space, so it is not available for lunch. In good weather, M.S. students can split the period in half (assuming periods are close to 40 minutes long) with

one half of students eating and one having recess for the first half of the period and the two groups then swapping midway. This would change the need with full enrollment to approximately 95 for period 4, 112 for period 5, and 119 for period 6, which would fit in the existing areas (Cafeteria A, Cafeteria C, Blue Gym).

b. Prepared lunches. Food services should consider offering box lunches and limit options in order to serve lunch as quickly as possible to each group.

c. Alternative options. In good weather, our assumption is that most H.S students would choose to eat off campus. We are also interested in seeing if the Village can put up tables/umbrellas in park areas for student seating. In inclement weather, we have insufficient seating for all students. We want to avoid both the lack of seats in existing areas as well as H.S. students congregating in stairwells and hallways. We could consider returning to cafeteria tables with permanent plexiglass barriers, in which students are not seated 3' apart. Other districts are using this option in cafeterias and classrooms.

d. Gym. To make up for the lack of seating on inclement weather days, we would need to take over the high school gym for MS/HS seating, using furniture (folding chairs and tables) that needs to be purchased and would be able to be rapidly set up and taken down so that that gym would still be available for school day/ after school athletics. At 6' distancing, we could seat 128 students in the high school gym.[3] All middle school students can be accommodated in that space, but not all high school students can be. Splitting middle school lunch/ recess between two groups as well as adding additional areas requires additional supervision. Currently lunch is supervised each period by 5 monitors (Cafeteria A, Cafeteria B, Cyber Cafe, Cafeteria C, Blue Gym). If all those areas were used plus the field, we would need two additional monitors to monitor students outside. In inclement weather, these monitors could supervise students in the high school gym and auditorium. If the middle school gym was also used, we would still be short. Mr. Hricay has indicated that it is difficult to find monitors in the current climate. Teachers could be paid to supervise, but most middle school teachers would have conflicts with either team meetings or their own lunch, and many teachers will be unlikely to want to work lunch periods. There are also concerns over the inability for students to socially distance when lined up for lunch, particularly in inclement weather, and the possibility of lines stretching out the doors of the building into the courtyard. All of this has an impact upon PE classes. In good weather, PE classes can meet outside. In inclement weather, with only one gym available, some PE classes would need to meet in classrooms. Since PE classes are often larger than would fit in a conventional classroom, additional rooms/ supervision would be needed for the overflow.

5. Mitigation strategies. The use of masks, open windows, good hand hygiene, will and must continue to be used in earnest. See Section VII. below.

C. Fully Virtual (“FV”) Option

1. Families may still choose fully remote learning for children.
2. Virtual learning cannot be used out of convenience, such as for vacation, travel, staying home on test days, priority for athletics, etc. These expectations must be made clear from the outset.
3. Fully Virtual students will access classes via Google Meet and learning materials via Google Classroom.
4. Open office hours will be provided in the afternoon to support fully remote students.
5. Possibility of fully remote teachers K-5 in September if virtual learning is still required.

See Section VIII. below regarding Task Force recommendations for additional support services needed for students and teachers working in the FV environment.

VII. Recommended Layered Mitigation Strategies to be Retained and/or Implemented

A. Masking/PPE. Task Force medical experts, as well as a whole host of experts nationwide and worldwide, cannot express strongly enough the significance of wearing masks as a way of preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

The Task Force wants to reiterate to parents and students the need to come to school with acceptable face coverings (surgical masks, sewn masks, gaiters with more than one layer of cloth, etc.) **that fit the child**. All too often, teachers see children with masks that do not properly (i.e. do not cover their noses and fall down). Child-sized surgical masks were highly recommended by the Task Force for elementary students, particularly since they are fairly breathable for gym and recess time. It is advised that children have more than one mask, since often they become sweaty.

B. Monitoring Health and Containing Transmission of the Virus

1. Daily Symptom Monitoring. It is required that students continue to respond to the daily health questionnaire to ensure those with possible COVID-symptoms do not come to school.
2. Contact Tracing must continue. While the Task Force sought ways in which the community could assist in this time-consuming effort on the part of district administrators, due to

the complexities of the classroom set-ups and confidentiality issues contact tracing really can only be performed by school employees.

3. Surveillance Testing.

a. Current District Program.

Currently, the District is utilizing voluntary surveillance testing at all three levels (elementary, Middle School and High School). The district is aiming to test 50 athletes, 50 secondary non-athletes, and 50 elementary students each week, which represents 5% of the student population. Experts, including those on the Task Force, believe surveillance testing is a critical tool used to evaluate the scope of COVID-19 within a population. According to the Task Force, voluntary surveillance testing now is helpful in that it (1) helps establish a baseline rate and (2) helps develop and hardwire this process on both the school and family side as routine testing may likely be part of our school life going forward.

b. Use of Rapid Antigen Test.

- The current test being used is a non-invasive, simple self-administered nose swab.
- While this test is not as useful to diagnose a positive case, it is regarded by medical and department of health experts as a sufficient surveillance tool for populations such as schools that are trying to establish a baseline positivity rate.

c. Input and Recommendations by the Task Force Surveillance Subcommittee

The Task Force Surveillance Subcommittee, which includes medical/infectious disease experts, provided the following feedback:

- Pelham's current surveillance testing system is sufficient. 5% is a very reasonable capture rate goal to kick off our surveillance testing.
- There needs to be a breadth of students who are tested each week (not just the same individuals volunteering).
- The District should consider outsourcing testing.
- A vendor could perhaps do surveillance testing with rapid tests and "event" testing such as what will be required to attend the prom.
- Is there a way to "reward" to increase participation/engagement in testing:
 - Stickers
 - Engage student council and other groups to come up with a testing campaign
 - Incentives
 - Have a "testing challenge" before the Olympics

- Testing (PCR not rapid) would be required for events like prom.
- For seniors, can make it a habit since most colleges will require surveillance testing.
- Can we make it easier to increase participation/engagement in testing:
 - District is making appointments and students will have to “opt-out”
 - Parent permission form required

The Subcommittee makes the following Recommendations:

1. The District should compare the results of its surveillance testing program with the overall positivity of Westchester County and look for divergence. This data should be made public on the District website alongside the number of individuals who test positive on a weekly basis.

2. The testing program should be randomized and set up in a way where the District is not testing the same students every week. The District should set the expectation that all will participate in the program, rather than make it voluntary. The District should be clear and transparent about the need for the testing program and its purpose (establishing a baseline and monitoring for changes). The District should seek to engage families and students in the testing program.

3. The District should provide links and information to recent changes in health policy (quarantine if vaccinated, travel advisory, etc.).

4. Metrics Tracking.

The Metrics Subcommittee recommends that a public dashboard should be posted on the District webpage, which would show the following:

- Graph: Westchester County positivity rate vs. school surveillance testing positivity rate
 - It is important to track the rate of change for each
- On the same page: either show the number of student/staff cases or link to the state website which shows this data.
- Reporting teacher/staff vaccinations to the best of ability noting data caveats is important.

The Task Force Metrics Subcommittee’s recommendation is that tracking metrics be used to understand if mitigation strategies need to change in order to keep schools open safely and can inform whether moving to all virtual or hybrid models if necessary.

According to the District, data is currently being collected and they expect metrics tracking to begin as soon as FTIP instruction begins. This data, which will be posted on the new district COVID webpage, will be updated on a weekly basis.

C. Teacher and Staff Vaccinations. Current vaccination rates of faculty and staff project that 50% of teachers and staff will be fully vaccinated (i.e. 2 weeks since their final shot) after spring break. The District has a goal of 75% by June 2021. According to the experts, 50% is a very good vaccination rate. 75% would be an extraordinary accomplishment.

D. Ventilation, Box Fans, Air Purifiers and Open Windows. The Task Force believes these are all extremely important measures to keep in place. The District has ordered air purifiers for all classrooms and areas that do not have the ability to open windows. Currently there are 6-8 air changes per hour in all rooms/buildings and more in those that have air conditioned spaces.

E. Other Safety Measures to Remain in Place.

1. Personal hygiene. The Task Force thinks handwashing and other cleaning measures are extremely important to continue and to do so with vigor, especially before and after transitions and before eating. Suggestion was made to have periodic lunch monitors to remind students of the need to wash hands/use hand sanitizers.

2. Cohorting. The CDC and NYS guidance continue to guide that this is best practice to keep schools safe. The Task Force agrees.

3. Barriers. As noted above, the Task Force believes barriers cannot hurt and can help keep students separated. They also offer a measure of mental comfort for some staff and teachers, and therefore are worthwhile for the District to continue to use.

4. Distancing. In addition to the distancing requirements in classrooms, the District must ensure appropriate distancing on the playground, in the cafeteria, and hallways and corridors, bathrooms, and during specials such as band and chorus in accordance with guidelines and to the greatest extent possible.

VIII. Mental Health, Wellness and Other Support Systems Upon Return

The Task Force believes it is extremely important to ensure that the mental health and well-being of community members remains a top priority for the return to FTIP, whether it be for those making the transition to fully in-person, students who will remain fully virtual (“FV”) (and no longer have other virtual partners who were previously in the hybrid sections). In addition, teachers are going to need more support than ever to continue to support more students in the classroom as well as maybe just one or two virtual students.

A. Student Mental Health and Wellness

Some of the concerns raised by the Task Force Student Mental Health Subcommittee include:

1. General concerns.

- When students transition back, we will need additional clinicians/resources to support the needs of all students, FTIP and FV.
- We are now in the middle of the annual review season with all counselors/clinicians heavily involved in meetings and evaluations, on top of their mandated services they have to provide.
- Many students have experienced a “loss”, whether it is having lost a family member or loss of various experiences.

2. Current FV students.

- Those who do not want to come back FTIP, but are being forced to come back will have their own challenges.
- Those who are thriving in the FV setting due to the flexibility of learning at home will face challenges in the classroom structure

3. K-5 concerns.

- Younger children’s mental health needs manifest in physical ailments. We need to ensure that everyone is aware.
- Some students will be anxious since they have not been allowed to be social all year. Also being back does not mean they can go back to socializing as before the pandemic.
- It will be like the first day of school for some students. Teachers will need to address building a community with the entire class. Students may have increased difficulty separating from their parents.
- FV students will feel even more isolated since everyone else will be back. They need opportunities to engage with the FTIP students. Maybe have them on the Smart Board and not just on the teacher’s screen.
- Morning meeting is a powerful tool for teachers. That should be used to address mental health /social-emotional skills and concerns.
- Regression in pragmatic language, play and emotion regulation skills (nonverbal and verbal communication skills, navigating classroom routines, perspective-taking skills, conflict resolution) in a more stimulating environment (more students) and increased student: teacher ratio (especially K-1).
- May see increased fatigue in younger students. Need time to build stamina for the school day (especially K-1).
- There has been an increase in pandemic-related anxiety symptoms (ex. germs, closeness, OCD tendencies).

4. 6-12 concerns.

- After they come back, if students are having a difficult time, they can't just be sent down to PPS. We need a different system/process in place and a place to go to take a break.
- Students will likely be anxious about academic performance as it relates to Regents or end of the year exams.
- Students struggling with managing a routine in a hybrid schedule, sharing thoughts with parents about how to help their children establish a different routine or structure with doing school 5 days in-person - to help with routines such as sleep cycles.

The Task Force Subcommittee's Recommendations:

- Community building at all levels will be important. They haven't experienced it all year. Classes/grade-levels may need a day to bond, perhaps a team-building activity or orientation day.
- If we already know of students who will have a difficult time coming back to school full time, can there be a way to have them back earlier than the rest of the group to ease them in.
- Any "new students" who were FV all year who are planning on coming back in-person need an opportunity to come into the school before everyone returns.
- Every class that has an FV student needs a plan and community activities that will involve FV students daily.
- Provide parent training to help with the transition back to school full-time:
 - Separation anxiety for students who have been FV and now coming back
 - How to handle change in routines for students, and how to recognize and deal with behavior change
- Survey students about any concerns coming back. Some of the concerns can be addressed quite easily (e.g., if students are worried about other students wearing masks appropriately, they might really appreciate hearing in some sort of an "assembly" that inappropriate mask-wearing will be addressed by the administration). However, other concerns might be things we are not yet aware of.
- Reach out to community agencies to collaborate to provide additional resources.
- A primer/assembly for students about appropriate passing time in the hallways, not congregating in groups, proper social distancing, etc. would be helpful. Perhaps dividing the assembly by alpha groups would help maintain smaller sizes. For example, A-G meets one time, H-M another time, e.g. Some kind of introductory meeting for each grade level might be helpful to set expectations.
- MS: Shift in the social structure is going to increase positive/negative interactions among students. Those who are anxious about social structures will have greater anxiety. Videos for various scenarios should be provided before students come back, such as expectations

for lunchrooms, recess, etc., prior to returning for parents to watch with their students, and also teachers can show them as needs arise.

- K-5: Teachers should initially focus on classroom routines and expectations, social expectations, and pragmatic language skills.
- Teachers should consider adding a “closing-circle”/ “afternoon meeting” at the end of the day to balance the whole child focus.

B. Supporting Teachers

In addition, the following recommendations have been made by the Task Force Subcommittee on Supporting Teachers with Instructional Challenges Managing In-Person and Virtual Students:

INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES K-5	POSSIBLE OPTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Maintaining engagement between virtual and live students; teachers need support to manage that essential connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote blended learning approaches: ways that virtual children can participate in synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences; for upper elementary, provides an essential screen break • Explore whether shared staff can <i>Meet</i> live with children across schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teaching Assistants - assigned to work with K-1 full virtual students ○ Special areas ○ Support room for asynchronous work • Explore alternative ways for IE Blocks and AIS

<p>Classroom physical environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger students not being able to hear properly both in person and virtual (camera, masks, barriers, etc.) • Experience for in person students will change, lack of mobility (moving around the room because of safety measures) • Will students be able to see points of instruction, tech, etc. • Ability to hear properly both in person and virtual (camera, masks, barriers, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate new barriers without borders • Examine how Chromebooks on a mobile cart can expand visual access to class from different parts of the classroom • Assess how portable projectors expand visual access to students in other parts of classroom • Extend use of voice amplification devices projects teacher speech to class and home, upon request
<p>Need to review logistics, safety, and pedagogical planning concerns ahead of program change; continual need for professional learning and preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The District considered an asynchronous learning day for teachers which could provide time to plan lessons and prepare for changes in classroom safety • Prior to April 12, furniture will be returned to classroom, and procedures will be developed at the building level • It is recommended that the district maintain Wednesday half-days to continue to provide time for such teacher needs
<p>Assessment of and for learning in the virtual and in-person environment remains a concern</p>	<p>Continue to explore ways to promote more authentic learning experiences for children, and seek best practices in the field</p>

<p>Pacing and structure of the day; routines, circling back to virtual students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that particular facets of the curriculum are met for ALL students - ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time will be needed for transitions with more students in class, while others remain virtual • Need to find ways to take advantage of outside learning environments, while remaining connected with full virtual students • Experiences may look different from school-to-school based on space constraints inside and outside • Consider restructuring of non-core learning time
<p>Messaging to virtual families; experiences will change, potential inequities with virtual students</p>	<p>Public relations: the District needs to be clear with parents about expectations of the in-person learning and full-virtual experience</p>
<p>What is the future for virtual learners (fall 2021)?</p>	<p>Should the District offer a full-virtual experience in September, it must seriously consider a full-virtual teacher model.</p>

IX. Recommended Communications Strategy and Community Outreach

The Task Force has recommended that the District remain as transparent as possible in regard to all of its positions and plans. The new District webpage on Coronavirus Information is an excellent start: <https://www.pelhamschools.org/reopening-plan-2020-21/ftip>. The Task Force recommends that the District add a District Surveillance Testing Dashboard so people can see the number of positive cases in our schools, compared with local and statewide trends, as well as the other metrics cited by the Metrics Task Force Subcommittee. The Task Force also recommends more information in general regarding surveillance testing, such as what the test itself is like and the purpose of the testing. Perhaps an FAQ page might be useful as well.

The Task Force also urges continued outreach to the community, particularly in two areas: (1) to urge children to sign up for surveillance testing as essential to our ability to monitor and track potential COVID outbreaks, and (2) with regard to seeking substitute teachers, teaching assistants, and monitors. Interested individuals should apply on [olasjobs.org](https://www.olasjobs.org) and email Amy Heese at aheese@pelhamschools.org.

X. Fall 2021 Planning

The Task Force recommends that it reconvene no later than May 1, 2021 to begin plans for Fall 2021, with a goal of providing recommendations so that the District can have fall reopening

plans in place by June 25, 2021. A key concern facing the Task Force will be how to bring 100% of the H.S. and M.S. students back FTIP, assuming a vaccine will not be available for kids under 16 at the time. In such a case, obtaining additional space and/or the consideration of other acceptable mitigation strategies must be rigorously pursued. Another key decision point will be whether the District will offer a full-virtual option. If so, the Task Force Subcommittee on Supporting Teachers recommends the District should create District-wide virtual teacher positions for K-1, 2-3, 4-5 at the minimum (depending upon interest/enrollment).

XI. Conclusion

The findings and recommendations of the Task Force are that given the declining community COVID-19 infection rates, increasing vaccination rates among teachers and staff, and the community as a whole, and the acceptance of a new distancing standard of 3 feet by the scientific community, Pelham should bring students to full time in person instruction this spring to the greatest extent practicable, and that it can do so in a safe manner.

Currently, Pelham elementary schools are able to safely allow for the return of students to FTIP classroom instruction. All rooms are able to accommodate 3 feet of spacing between students, stem to stem (and in some cases more than 3 feet of distancing). All of the current scientific data, including that used by the CDC just last week, indicate that 3 feet of spacing between students is safe. Scientific data also suggests that transmission rates are lower among children than adults, are low in schools with mitigation steps in place, and that children become less ill when they are COVID-positive (though more so in secondary children).

Regardless of this strong scientific data suggesting 3 feet distancing is safe, NYS guidance is still in effect which indicates that there must be 6 feet distancing or barriers in place. As such, Pelham will continue the use of barriers placed on every student desk, as well as a multi-faceted mitigation effort that includes ensuring mask-wearing, personal hygiene, proper ventilation, and conducting surveillance testing, and monitoring positive cases and tracking trends. Such distancing and other mitigation steps will be required at all levels (elementary and secondary).

The H.S. and M.S., while likely unable to bring students back FTIP, can safely bring back students more, depending on the final survey results being received. Currently, it is expected that there will be a phase-in of more students by grade during the course of April, with a focus on factors such as Regents exams, assessments, and milestones (prom and graduation). At this juncture, the Task Force is awaiting the H.S. and M.S. survey data to finalize this report (from its current draft form). The Task Force plans to meet in the weeks following spring break to continue its planning for the H.S. and M.S., assess the elementary FTIP roll-out, and to commence planning for next year.

[1] Cohorting is when groups of students are kept together with the same peers and staff throughout the school day to reduce the risk for spread throughout the school.

[2] Subcommittee Notes. With all students in person, numbers for lunch are as follows: Middle School - Period 4 (Grade 6) - 189 Period 5 (Grade 7) - 224 Period 6 (Grade 8) - 237 High School (not accounting for alternate day lunches)- Period 4 - 274 Period 5 - 309 Period 6 - 350 Period 7 - 304 Period 8 - 218 Period by period, for the secondary campus, this works out as a potential combined: Period 4 - 463 Period 5 - 533 Period 6 - 587 Period 7 - 304 Period 8 - 218 At current 6' seating, we have the following areas potentially available: Cafeteria A - 30 Cafeteria B (currently used for HS) - 12 Cyber Cafe (MS peanut free zone 4-6) - 14 Cafeteria C - 38 Blue Gym - 66 Middle School Gym Bleachers - 65 High School Main Gym Bleachers - 42 Auditorium (not counting 25 balcony seats which would not be safe) - 53 For a total of 320 per period

[3] This could work out as follows: Period 4 - 463 students - 134 middle school students seated in existing areas, 55 overflow middle school students seated in high school gym, 73 seats available for high school students. 201 high school students still need seating. 160 could be seated between bleachers in middle school and high school gyms and auditorium. 41 remaining. -12 in Cafeteria B = 29 unseated Period 5 - 533 students - 134 middle school students seated in existing areas, 90 overflow middle school students seated in high school gym, 38 seats available for high school students. 271 high school students still need seating. 160 could be seated between bleachers in middle school and high school gyms and auditorium. 111 remaining. -12 in Cafeteria B = 99 unseated Period 6 - 587 students - 134 middle school students seated in existing areas, 103 overflow middle school students seated in high school gym, 21 seats available for high school students. 329 high school students still need seating. 160 could be seated between bleachers in middle school and high school gyms and auditorium. 169 remaining. -12 in Cafeteria B = 157 unseated Period 7 - 304 students - 160 high school students in conventional cafeteria + blue gym. 144 remaining. 128 can be seated in the high school gym and the rest on bleachers. Period 8 - 218 students - 160 high school students in conventional cafeteria + blue gym. 58 remaining.