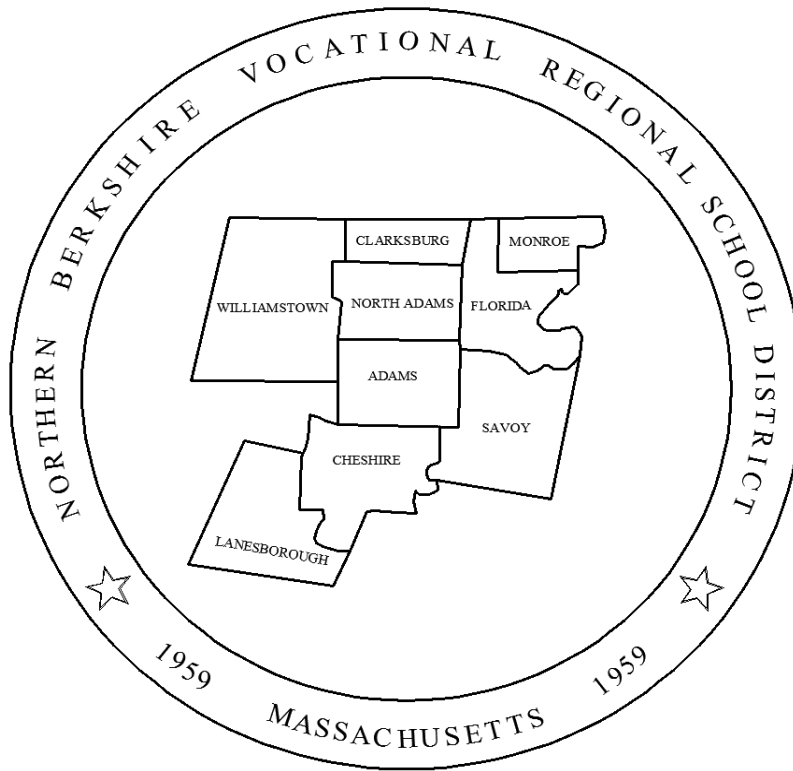


Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District

McCann Technical School



In-Person Learning Plan – May 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Assessment	9
COVID-19 Safety Protocols	3
Enhance and Adapt Existing Universal Supports	7
Enrollment and Attendance	9
Extracurricular Activities	6
Facilities	5
Food Service	5
Full In-Person Learning Model	2
Guidance Department	12
Homework Help	3
Introduction	2
Letter from the Superintendent	1
Planning and Instruction	9
Plan to Address Increased Support of Intensive Mental Health Needs	8
Remote Learning During Full In-Person Learning Time	2
Social Emotional Supports	7
Special Education Services	10
Student Supervision	3
Technology Needs	4
Title I	9
Transportation	4
APPENDIX A: COVID-19 Protocols	15
APPENDIX B: Transportation Guidance	18
APPENDIX C: Guidance on In-Person Learning	28
APPENDIX D: MIAA Rules Modifications & Guidelines	42



Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District

70 Hodges Cross Road, North Adams, MA 01247

www.mccanntech.org

James J. Brosnan, Superintendent

Tel. (413) 663-5383 Fax (413) 664-9424

jbrosnan@mccanntech.org

Adams
Cheshire
Clarksburg
Florida
Lanesborough
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North Adams
Savoy
Williamstown

Letter from the Superintendent

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly changed all of our lives and created new expectations for keeping all citizens safe. The reopening of school and the return to work will never be without risk. We have developed mitigation strategies in accordance with published guidelines received from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. These strategies encompass cleaning and sanitizing, social distancing, the wearing of masks and related hygiene requirements, and common sense and good practice.


We have balanced these safety strategies to align with a carefully chosen school reopening plan that incorporates safety and learning. On March 17, 2020 all schools in the Commonwealth were ordered to cease in-person educational activities. Our fall reopening plan recognized that two essential tenets of our educational process were missing, namely vocational/technical hands-on learning and recognition that many at-risk students would greatly benefit from in-person classes to maintain their education goals.

Our initial plan recognized that our mission is to graduate technically skilled, academically prepared and socially responsible individuals. Our core values of respect, effort, accountability, communication and honor were best supported by our initial hybrid school reopening plan. The Commissioner has directed all high schools in the Commonwealth to resume full in-person learning on May 17, 2021.

This plan outlines the overall concept of how and when we will open recognizing that the 'how' we operated in the past will not be able to be maintained in the current environment. The transportation, food service, scheduling, athletics, and a myriad of contextual issues must be specifically mapped out for you and once completed they will be communicated to you. It is our intent to commence the start of full in-person learning on May 17, 2021 consistent with the Commissioner's directive.

I know the anxiety that all of us are feeling as we endeavor to begin this new chapter and we remain focused on ensuring we can implement a safe educational strategy that embodies that principle.

Very truly yours,



JAMES J. BROSNAN
Superintendent

Introduction

The April 27, 2021 “Guidance on In-Person Learning and Student Learning Time Requirements” provided by the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) states that “Schools and districts have rigorously adopted the health and safety strategies outlined in DESE’s guidance and we have seen very few incidences of transmission in schools.” As a result, the Commissioner has indicated that high schools will need to resume full-in-person learning on May 17, 2021. In preparation of the return to in-person learning, McCann Technical School has created this document outlining a return of all students to the building.

Full In-Person Learning Model

In order to ensure proper mitigation strategies are being implemented, McCann will return to in-person learning by using a cohort model. Students will be assigned a cohort, one academic and one vocational. They will alternate between these cohorts on a week-to-week basis as is our standard practice. During a student's academic week their cohort will be assigned to a specific room where they will take all of their classes and teachers will travel from room-to-room to teach their assigned classes. In a vocational week students will be in a cohort by grade level within their vocational program and they will be in their shop area for the week. In some cases, students will be assigned out of their cohort to attend a specific elective or receive individually required services.

The cohort model will be as follows:

Week A	Monday - Friday
9 th Grade	Academics: 6 cohorts of 21/22 students
10 th Grade	In-person shop: Cohorts by grade level and shop
11 th Grade	In-person shop: Cohorts by grade level and shop
12 th Grade	Academics: 5 cohorts of 22 students

Week B	Monday - Friday
9 th Grade	In-person shop: Cohorts by grade level and shop
10 th Grade	Academics: 6 cohorts of 22/23 students
11 th Grade	Academics: 5 cohorts of 23 students
12 th Grade	In-person shop: Cohorts by grade level and shop

Remote Learning During Full In-Person Learning Time

Fully remote learning is still an option for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. DESE’s guidance indicates that this is likely the last opportunity for fully remote learning. Further, the guidance indicates that this change to full in-person learning will necessitate changes in the remote learning options available to students. Students who choose to learn in a fully remote setting will be responsible for “...largely the same classroom activities as students who are learning in-person.” Following DESE

recommendations, remote students will follow a regularly scheduled day via livestream broadcasts of the classroom with teachers conducting “eyes-on” check-ins with students throughout the day. Students electing to participate in fully remote learning are ineligible to participate in extracurricular activities.

COVID-19 Safety Protocols

We will adhere to the latest COVID-19 safety protocols as disseminated by DESE. These protocols include masking, sanitation, hygiene, social distancing, quarantining, and the procedures for notifying school officials of any COVID-19 cases. These protocols are contained in Appendix A.

a) **Masking**

Two layered masks are required (i.e. cloth, surgical paper or kn95 masks); bandanas, gaiters or masks with vents are not acceptable. Masks need to fit snugly and cover both the nose and the mouth. Students must have their masks appropriately donned at all times except for mask breaks and while eating breakfast or lunch.

b) **Social Distancing**

Students are to remain at least 3 feet apart when both parties are wearing and appropriately donning their mask. Students will remain at least 6 feet apart during mask breaks and while eating in the cafeteria/gymnasium.

c) **Hygiene**

If multiple students will be utilizing the same tools or equipment the student will be required to disinfect shared items prior to and after use with alcohol wipes containing at least 60% isopropyl alcohol. Students will regularly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or when hand washing is not available students will utilize the hand sanitizing stations set up around the building.

Homework Help

The after-school Homework Help program will be offered and will be coordinated by the director of student services and associated staff. One-hour in-person sessions will be offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00 PM until 4:00 PM in the school library. We will also continue to offer a one-hour remote session on Wednesdays from 3:00PM until 4:00PM to provide support to students in a remote setting. Each session will be led by at least two staff members who will provide assistance to students with assignments, re-teaching of materials, organization, assessments, etc. Staff will maintain an online student attendance log for each session. For in-person sessions, staff will also ensure students leave school grounds safely by monitoring students being picked up after the session from the front lobby, or that student drivers leave immediately after the session.

Student Supervision

1.) Student Discipline Related to COVID-19-Safety

Students will be required to follow COVID-19 safety protocols at all times while they are in the building, on school grounds or on the school bus. Failure to follow COVID-19 safety protocols will result in disciplinary action up to and including suspension.

2.) E-Hall Pass

Students will utilize the E-Hall Pass software to leave the vocational area or classroom. Students will create contactless passes on an electronic device. The teacher will then approve or deny the pass. Pass limits will be set for the number of passes that the student receives for the week as well as the number of passes that are issued to designated areas at a particular time in order to maintain reduced hallway traffic and implement proper social distancing protocols.

3.) Restrooms

Students will be allocated a combination of bathroom and mask breaks at the discretion of their teacher. All students leaving the classroom or vocational area will be required to fill out a digital hall pass using the E-Hall Pass software and submit it to their teacher for approval.

4.) Lockers

Students will not be assigned lockers for the 2020-2021 school year.

5.) Nurse

Students may write a pass through the E-Hall Pass system for approval by their teacher to the nurse for routine medical situations (i.e. medication for headaches, upset stomach etc.). A maximum of two students will be allowed to use a nurse's pass simultaneously. Students that require immediate emergency medical attention will require a call from their instructor to the nurse prior to the student's arrival at the nurse's office. Students requiring daily medications will be assigned a scheduled time to go to the nurse's office to receive their medication.

6.) School Counselors

Students can request to see a school counselor or a counselor can write the student an E-Hall pass to see them during the day if a situation arises that a student and counselor need to meet. This pass will need to be approved by the classroom teacher before the student leaves their designated vocational area or classroom to see the requested counselor. Any student in crisis will be allowed to go to the guidance office following a phone call to guidance from the instructor informing them of the situation.

Technology Needs

For the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year students will be required to bring their school-issued Chromebook for all academic week classes. The Chromebook is not required during the vocational week. Students will be responsible for having their Chromebook fully charged upon arrival at school each day.

Transportation

McCann will follow the updated guidance provided by DESE on transportation (Appendix B: School Year 2020-21 Reopening Transportation Guidance). According to this guidance there will be two students allowed per seat, school mask rules will be in effect, and windows will be open a minimum of two inches. On cool or rainy days students should dress accordingly as the bus windows will be required to stay open. The school building will be open for students starting at 7:40. Unloading buses upon arrival at the school will be supervised by school personnel and done in an orderly, socially distanced manner. Any student who does not follow the health and safety protocols on the bus will face disciplinary action up to, and including, revocation of bus privileges. Student drivers or those dropped off by parents will only be allowed to enter the building prior to 7:50 if they wish to eat breakfast and must report directly to

the cafeteria. All students arriving at the school by family vehicles must be dropped off at the front entrance and upon entering the building must proceed immediately to the cafeteria/gymnasium area. Student drivers or those being dropped off by parents who do not wish to eat breakfast may enter after 7:50 and report directly to their classroom or shop.

Facilities

Daily cleaning and sanitizing activities will continue as they have during the period of hybrid learning. Hand sanitizing stations are located throughout the building and classrooms are equipped with hand sanitizer and alcohol wipes. Water bottle refilling stations have been installed in various locations in the building for student use. Classrooms will be configured to adhere to the three-foot social distancing included in the updated DESE guidance. Student desks will face the front of the room and meet the required 3 feet of distance seat edge to seat edge. A six-foot clearance will be located at the front of the classroom for teacher presentations. Full DESE guidance on facility maintenance and set-up can be found in Appendix C (Guidance on In-Person Learning and Student Learning Time Requirements).

Food Service

We will continue with our free breakfast and free lunch program for all students through the end of the school year.

Lunch and breakfast meals will be conducted with six-feet of social distancing requirements as student masks will be removed to eat. An additional lunch shift has been incorporated during the day to allow for appropriate social distancing in the cafeteria and gymnasium during meal times. Sufficient time for the proper disinfecting of the lunchroom(s) will be provided between lunch shifts. Teachers will dismiss their classes to lunch and then monitor the hallway for a few minutes to ensure the flow of traffic to the lunchroom is orderly and socially distanced.

Lunch Schedule

1st Lunch-	10:30-11:00
2nd Lunch-	11:15-11:45
3rd Lunch-	12:00-12:30
4th Lunch-	12:45-1:15
CA Lunch-	1:15-1:45

1st Lunch	Week A... Shop 10 & 11- CAD, AU, AMT, EI Week B... Shop 09 & 12- CAD, AU, AMT, EI
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2nd Lunch	Week A... All Seniors Week B... All Juniors
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3rd Lunch	Week A... All Freshmen Week B... All Sophomores
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4th Lunch	Week A... Shop 10 & 11- MF, CP, BT, IT Week B... Shop 09 & 12- MF, CP, BT, IT
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Extracurricular Activities

Outdoor athletics resumed their activities this spring on April 26th. All athletic programs will use the sport-specific modification guides provided by the MIAA as well as adhere to the relevant protocols contained in this document (Appendix D: MIAA Rules Modifications & Guidelines). Extra-curricular clubs and activities will only be able to resume virtually for the remainder of this school year. The decision about clubs and activities will be reevaluated for the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

Athletics

McCann will be offering baseball, softball, boys' varsity lacrosse, and girls' varsity lacrosse this spring. All spring sports will be conducted using the MIAA modifications as noted on the accompanying appendices annotated by sport that adhere to the protocols set by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environment Affairs (EEA). Locker rooms will not be available for athlete use so students need to come to school appropriately dressed to be able to practice or play after school. School dress code policies will be relaxed. Coaches will review with players what the appropriate dress for school will be specific to their sport. Transportation to and from athletic contests will be conducted following DESE transportation guidance. Transportation to and from practices will be the responsibility of the player or their family on days the player is not scheduled to be in the building. Students must be academically eligible, have a current and valid physical exam, and be participating in in-person learning to participate in spring sport contests.

Guidelines for all sports: (for sport-specific information please see MIAA appendices)

- 1) Mask use will be mandatory at all practices, competitions, and bus rides.
- 2) Masks must comply with school rules: two-layer face coverings are required. No gaiters, bandanas, or masks with vents are permitted. Players must have multiple masks with them so they may change as needed (if damp or soiled).
- 3) Players must have their own water bottle(s) that are filled prior. There will be no refill stations available so players should bring as much water as they will need.
- 4) Players who are in school the day of a practice or game should come to school in clothing that will allow them to practice or play right after school. School dress code will be relaxed and students may wear sweatpants and/or sweatshirts (or similar) over athletic clothing if needed. Players may wear their jerseys or pants to school as well but shorts must be covered up with sweatpants (or similar).
- 5) Players will report directly to practice after school and leave directly after practice. Players cannot loiter around the building or the practice fields once activities conclude. Player's transportation home after games or practice must be punctual and players are to leave athletic fields directly.

- 6) Players who do not comply with social distancing and COVID-19 mitigation practices will receive an initial warning and direction from the coaching staff. If the behavior continues the player will be removed from the team.
- 7) Spectators will be allowed at athletic competitions but must adhere to masking and social distancing (6 feet) protocols.

Social Emotional Supports

Transitioning back to full in-person learning will require a period of reorientation to schedules, routines, and social interactions among peers. Students have had a long period of time away from their typical schooling environment and it will take time to reacclimate them to school. For some students the period of time away from normal learning has been very difficult and presented numerous challenges. Faculty and staff will be as attuned to this as possible and time will be dedicated to ensuring students' social-emotional needs are met when reentering school. This will also include a lightened workload for students for the rest of the year.

The social emotional well-being of the entire school community, which includes students, staff, and families, will continue to be a priority for us as we make our way through the school year. Ensuring that the school environment is safe, secure, and positive, will aid us in being able to provide quality learning experiences for our students. There are many facets to supporting our school community's social emotional needs, but we will focus on following the recommendations that DESE suggests schools prioritize in their reopening plans.

Enhance and Adapt Existing Universal Supports

1. Engage Families as Partners

Strong two-way communication will be maintained in the family's primary language and preferred method of communication either directly through phone or email, through the all-call messaging system, through the school's website or the student information system, Aspen-X2. Communications regarding planning for the return to a full in-person model will be mostly from school administrators. Most other family communication will come from the teachers and school counselors who interact directly with students.

The support needs of each family will be reassessed through frequent communication and outreach done by staff members on a continual basis. The COVID-19 virus has impacted families in a variety of ways. Families that are identified with needs related to technology, transportation, food security, housing, and/or health concerns will be assisted by the school to obtain the appropriate resources. As these needs are identified, the student's school counselor will be notified and they will assist the family with the proper community agencies and resources they may need if the concern is not something that can be addressed within the school. The director of student services will also assist the school counselors with connecting families to community-based support services if needed.

School office staff will continue to make daily attendance calls when students are absent from school. Classroom teachers will also communicate with students and their families if students miss class for multiple days to ensure they are receiving missing assignments and to see if additional assistance is needed. School counselors will make phone calls to families if students miss an extended period of school time (3 or more days), or if the school recognizes a pattern in a student's absenteeism (i.e. student is absent every Monday).

2. Support and Engage Staff

Communication with staff will be maintained to help them manage the updated health and safety protocols and overall educational changes that need to be made in this transitional period. The ever-evolving guidance and adaptability that will occur throughout the school year will be a challenge that the staff will overcome together when communication, teamwork, and self-care is made a priority. Training was provided to prepare all staff for the operational protocols and opportunities for practice were provided during the staff professional development days in September. Building protocols and safety procedures will be reviewed with all staff prior to returning to a full in-person model.

3. Adapt and Deploy an Updated Learning Model

Due to the COVID-19 virus, the hybrid learning model at the start of the school year was a new learning model for the entire school community and continued to evolve throughout the school year. As we return to full in-person learning, we will continue to adapt and refine this model to ensure the proper supports are in place for students, staff, and families. When students return to school for full in-person learning, classroom time will be spent reviewing the health and safety protocols of the building to ensure students are familiar with these procedures.

Teachers will be encouraged to focus on establishing a strong sense of emotional safety and responsiveness by spending time at the start of the return to full in-person learning establishing these standards with their students. Teachers will also focus on including strategies of movement breaks, collaboration, communication, and emotional support breaks into their lessons. Teachers will continue to use the routines they have established to help students integrate in-person and remote learning into one experience rather than seeing them as separate from each other. The professional development and common technology platforms that the teachers utilize to communicate with and instruct students have been helpful in this regard.

Plan to Address Increased Support of Intensive Mental Health Needs

Due to the COVID-19 virus and its impact on students and families, schools will likely see an increase in the number of students experiencing more intensive mental health needs. Additional support for students to cope with chronic stress, anxiety, and depression may be needed. The director of student services, school counselors, and school psychologist are prepared for the increased need to provide social emotional and mental health support to our students. This team has also worked to adapt these supports to adhere to the proper health and safety protocols when students are in the building and to follow the proper regulations regarding provision of virtual supports when needed.

During the professional days that were provided in September, the school counselors and director of student services trained teachers and staff in identifying students who may be experiencing mental health challenges through a program called “Psychological First Aid.” The school counselors and director of student services participated in this training prior to the school closure and felt it would be beneficial for all staff to be able to look for the signs of a student who is struggling and then know how to initially address the situation and then follow up with the appropriate staff in the building for further assistance.

A greater focus on social emotional learning (SEL) has been integrated throughout the general education curriculum in both the academic and vocational settings. During the September professional development days, the school counselors and director of student services provided some techniques to the staff on how to do this and also referred to DESE’s five core SEL competencies for guidance (self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness), which teachers received training on previously. The Transitions courses that the school counselors teach also focus on social-emotional well-being and coping in these challenging situations.

Planning and Instruction

Full in-person learning will utilize our traditional 8-period academic day. Academic teachers will travel from cohort to cohort through the day and students will remain in their assigned classroom. English, mathematics, and science will be double period classes with mask breaks at the teacher's discretion. History, health and academic support will be single period classes with mask breaks at the teacher's discretion. Physical education will be conducted as it has been through the year with students completing and electronically recording fitness activities during their vocational week.

Vocational teachers will be assigned their cohort of students by shop. Shops will provide mask breaks at the teacher's discretion.

CTE classes will meet four times per week with students reporting to CTE by shop cohort at their assigned classrooms, either D105 or D107.

Assessment

Teachers will adjust their assessment expectations to reflect the needed period of time to transition to in-person learning for the school community and the amount of learning that has been able to be achieved during previous hybrid learning. Academic teachers will assign no more than 2 graded assignments per week and student workloads should be reduced in order to successfully transition the school community back to the building. Vocational teachers will assign no more than 10 graded assignments per week and administer the NOCTI assessments to their students to assess skills gaps that will need to be addressed in the future. The minimum grade students can receive for their courses during this pandemic is a 55 for any quarter. For the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year no homework will be assigned.

Title I

The school's Title I program will continue to have paraprofessionals working with small groups of students, or individual students, identified as being at-risk for making progress in their academic classes or vocational programs. In these situations paraprofessionals will provide supplemental instruction in literacy and mathematics skills, reteach concepts, assist students with completing missing assignments, complete MCAS preparatory activities, and support students in improving their study skills. These paraprofessionals will work alongside both academic and vocational teachers in the classroom to better enable students to achieve the learning standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The paraprofessionals are able to provide supplemental and targeted instruction as needed for all students, and in particular for those who are identified by their teachers as at-risk for not making progress. Students who are identified as needing more intensive supports may be referred to the director of student services for Title I services.

Enrollment and Attendance

Students seeking to switch between modes of learning (remote or in-person) will need to notify the school as soon as possible. Every effort will be made to switch the student as soon as possible but a waiting period of up to two weeks may be necessary depending on a number of variables including, but not limited to: space constraints, scheduling availability, shop or academic cycle, and curriculum.

Attendance is vital for student knowledge acquisition. Students free of any COVID-19 symptoms and enrolled in in-person learning should make every effort to attend school every day. Participating remotely is only an option for students who chose fully-remote learning, or students adhering to quarantining protocols, or students who are COVID-19-positive but feel well enough to attend school.

Special Education Services

1) Delivery of IEP Services

Individual education plan (IEP) services will continue to be delivered in the full in-person learning model. Special education staff will discuss with families prior to the start of full in-person learning how and where IEP services will be delivered for the remainder of the school year. Throughout this school year, the director of student services has provided families with written notification that describes how their student's special education services will be delivered following the family discussions about changes in learning models or other adjustments that needed to be made to meet the student's needs. A template from DESE for this was modified to document and describe the school's efforts to provide IEP services in as similar a format as possible as outlined in the student's IEP, when taking into consideration health and safety requirements and the individual needs of the student. These plans were updated as needed throughout the school year and this will continue as the school transitions to a full in-person learning model.

In order to prioritize both the health and safety concerns of attending in-person schooling, as well as providing IEP services in the least restrictive environment, special education students will be assigned to cohorts as described in the "Full in-person learning model" section of this document. The cohorts will allow students to receive an academic and vocational schedule that is similar to their peers, but also follows the services that are outlined in their IEPs and allows them to appropriately work towards their learning goals. Whenever possible the cohort model will allow these students to participate in both their general education inclusion settings and their special education direct service settings with their normally assigned, and familiar, regular education content teachers, special education teachers, and additional support staff (as needed). There will still be an 8-period day that will run similar to the normal model with small modifications necessary to comply with social distancing rules, cohort student grouping, and lunch requirements.

Each student was assigned a special education liaison at the start of the school year who has ongoing communication with families about their student's special education services. Under the supervision of the director of student services, the liaison has also consulted with all of the student's teachers on a regular basis in terms of implementation of IEPs, coordination of services and supports (including coordination of paraprofessional supports), as well as monitoring progress towards learning goals. This will continue as we implement a full in-person learning model.

As described in the "Remote Learning During Full In-Person Learning Time" section of this document, families are able to choose a fully remote learning option for their student for the remainder of this school year. This will necessitate changes to the current remote options that are available to students, both in terms of content instruction and delivery of IEP services. In-person instruction is encouraged for students with disabilities so that their individual needs can be met most effectively. The student services department will make every effort to meet the needs of students with disabilities choosing a full remote learning model, but families and students should be aware that the delivery of services will be different from what students are currently receiving in a full remote or hybrid learning model. If a family chooses a full remote learning model initially, a request can be made for the student to transfer to the full in-person learning model. Families should anticipate there may be a two-week waiting period before students are able to transition to the in-person learning model due to the school needing to plan for the health and safety considerations of moving the student into an in-person cohort. Teaching, learning, and IEP services will continue in the full remote learning model during the waiting period.

2) Developing Positive Behavior Supports and Safe Learning Environments

All students will re-acclimate to school and learn at different rates and will have varying levels of need. Communication with families about their student's emotional and behavioral status during this transition period will be critical. Ensuring that the proper, and possibly additional supports for specific students, are in place to promote positive behavior and reduce challenging behaviors and feelings of anxiety will remain a priority throughout the school year. Teachers will include strategies that directly address student needs regarding the pandemic and other current events as part of their lessons and classroom routines. Before administering disciplinary consequences, educators and school administrators will consider whether the behavior displayed by a student is deemed inappropriate as a result of situations brought about by the pandemic or if they may be a direct result of a student's disability. To place a focus on correcting concerning behaviors and supporting students through this time of transition, educators and school administrators will utilize restorative practices and diversionary strategies, rather than punitive measures whenever possible.

3) Monitoring Student Progress

Monitoring of student progress as outlined in their IEP goals will continue throughout the school year. Special education liaisons will consult with the director of student services if the specific types of data that need to be collected must be altered due to the learning plan a student is following. Any necessary changes will be communicated to the student's family and their regular education teachers, if needed, by the special education liaison, and these changes will be documented through the progress reports that are issued to the family. Progress reports will continue to be issued to families at least as often as report cards are provided for students without disabilities and translated into the language of the home when required. If progress reports cannot be mailed to families, special education liaisons will communicate with families of students on their caseloads to determine which alternate method that family would prefer for receiving their student's progress reports (email or through the Aspen-X2 student information system).

4) Initial Evaluations, Reevaluations and IEP Team Meetings

During this school year, triennial evaluations, initial evaluations, and annual review Team meetings have been conducted as they are due. The director of student services will communicate with families if a need arises, due to changes in health and safety conditions, to extend the timelines for either an annual review Team meeting or evaluation process and will document the agreement in writing.

Team meetings will continue to be held in a virtual format whenever possible. The student will join the meeting virtually from within the school building from the guidance conference room. The director of student services and school counselors will join the meeting virtually from their school offices. The student's teachers will attend the meeting virtually from a private location in the school building. If the family requests an in-person meeting, the director of student services will be present in the room with no more than two family members and the student, at an appropriate social distance of at least six-feet, and with all participants wearing masks. All other Team members will join the meeting virtually. If the family agrees to a virtual meeting format, and the student is following a remote learning model, the student will also join in the virtual format from their learning location. This practice has been put in place to reduce the number of visitors to the school building and to maintain the health and safety of our school community.

Evaluations and testing will be scheduled with our contracted services providers. Student evaluation testing will occur in-person with the contracted service providers and all health and safety protocols will be followed during the testing period, whether the testing takes place within the school building or within the contracted service provider's office location. Virtual evaluation testing may be

implemented at the discretion of the contracted service provider, in consultation with the director of student services, if health and safety conditions change. The type of evaluation testing that a student is scheduled for (in-person or virtual) will be discussed with the family in advance.

DESE is continuing to advise schools to update the IEP as though the student will be attending school full time in-person, even if the student is currently following a different student learning model for this schoolyear. The school is prepared to adapt our approach to the delivery of IEP services due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 virus. Any changes to service delivery will be documented in writing to the family. Such changes due to a student's change in their learning model as a result of the COVID-19 virus do not result in a change of placement. The services outlined in the IEP remain and are considered "stay-put." Special education liaisons and/or the director of student services will continue to communicate and collaborate with families as the school responds to any changes.

5) Staffing, Specialized Safety Supplies/Protective Equipment and Training

Unique supports may be needed for some students with disabilities when they are unable to practice physical distancing on a routine basis and/or abide by other health and safety measures that will be followed such as wearing masks or frequent handwashing. Specialized safety supplies/protective equipment, and training on when and how to properly use this equipment, has been provided to staff working with these students, and this information will be reviewed as we transition to a full in-person model. The school nurse has trained all staff in the use of this equipment in accordance with the recommendation from DESE that schools follow the guidelines that the Center for Disease Control describes for "direct service providers." Direct service providers include any staff member that may come into close contact with a student that is unable to follow the expected health and safety measures at any given time. This could be due to a student's disability related needs, a student that may be experiencing a medical emergency and needs immediate attention while waiting for the school nurse to arrive, or a student that may need to be restrained. The specialized safety supplies and protective equipment has been issued directly to staff that will need it on a regular basis and will be distributed to additional staff that will need it now that a full in-person model is being adapted. There are also specialized safety supplies and protective equipment "stations" set up at various locations throughout the school so this material is easily accessible by staff if a situation arises.

Guidance Department

1) Student Counseling Meetings

School counselors and our school psychologist will continue to meet with students for counseling services such as providing support for social-emotional concerns, college and career planning, or checking in on academic and technical progress. These meetings will occur in-person and will adhere to the proper health and safety measures. If virtual meetings are necessary, the guidelines and procedures as put forth by both the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and Massachusetts School Counselor Association (MASCA) will be followed. These measures will ensure the proper ethics and privacy considerations are followed under the Family Educational Right and Privacy Act (FERPA).

2) Section 504 Accommodation Plans

The school counselors serve as 504 Accommodation Plan liaisons for students on their caseloads with these plans. 504 Plan meetings will be conducted as they are due. The school counselors will communicate with families if a need arises, due to changes in health and safety conditions in response to the COVID-19 virus, to postpone an annual review meeting. 504 Plan meetings will be held in a

virtual format whenever possible. Teachers will complete a form in advance of the meeting that summarizes the student's progress and any concerns the teacher may have in regards to updating the 504 Accommodation Plan. These forms will be reviewed with the family and student during the meeting and will help to inform any updates that are made to the 504 Accommodation Plan. The student will join the meeting virtually from within the school building from the guidance conference room. School counselors will join the meeting virtually from their school offices. If the family requests an in-person meeting, the school counselor will be present in the room with no more than two family members and the student, at an appropriate social distance of at least six-feet, and with all participants wearing masks. The student's teachers will only attend the meeting in a virtual format from a private location in the school building if the family requests their attendance in advance due to concerns with the student's progress in a particular class. The school counselor will consult with the director of student services to plan for this type of meeting if such a request is made by the family. If the family agrees to a virtual meeting format, and the student is following a remote learning model, the student will also join in the virtual format from their learning location. This practice has been put in place to reduce the number of visitors to the school building and to maintain the health and safety of our school community.

3) Staff and Family Communication

School counselors help with supporting family communication to streamline the process of communication between families and the school. Classroom teachers are also encouraged to have direct communication with families during the school year. The following procedures are in place to help support the communication surrounding student progress and needs. (Special education liaisons coordinate the family communication process for students that have IEPs. School counselors coordinate the family communication process for all other students.)

- School counselors communicate with families regarding mental health and social/emotional concerns. Any concern faculty or staff has regarding a student's mental and social/emotional health, or concerning behaviors, should be brought to the student's school counselor's attention.
- Teachers provide information to parents regarding their Google classroom, expectations, class syllabus, etc. and this information is available on the teacher's page of the school's website to help facilitate family communication. Families can also subscribe to guardian summaries as part of a teacher's Google classroom that will provide families with a weekly overview of missing work and assignments completed.
- If teachers have concerns about a student's 504 Accommodation Plan, the teacher will discuss this with the school counselor who can help the teacher understand the student's disability, accommodations, and also consider strategies to incorporate into the classroom to properly support the student.
- If a student has not attended two consecutive learning sessions, or misses two learning sessions in a week, teachers will contact families and document this contact. If a student's participation does not change after this communication, teachers will contact the student's school counselor, who will then contact the family.
- If a student has not completed two consecutive assignments, or two assignments in a week, teachers will notify the student's family. If a student's assignment completion does not improve teachers will contact the student's school counselor, who will then contact the family.

- If a student is missing more than 25% of assignments, or has missed five or more learning sessions by mid-quarter, teachers notify the student's school counselor and the school counselor will contact the family.
- When teachers contact families in the above instances, teachers will provide families with information about what assignments are missing, what the student needs to do to complete assignments, and what extra assistance is available to the student to get them on track. When teachers contact school counselors in the above instances, teachers will summarize the types of contact they have already made to the families so the counselors are aware of the attempts that have been made.
- When school counselors contact families in the above instances, they will discuss the student's individual circumstances and/or challenges the student is facing that may be impeding their ability to participate in learning sessions. The school counselor will discuss possible supports that can be put in place to assist the student and coordinates with the director of student services if additional supports may be needed. The school counselor will follow up with the teacher after the discussion with the family to share the appropriate information in terms of what the plan will be for the student moving forward to be successful in the academic class or vocational program.

4) Transitions Classes

The school counselors will continue to teach Transitions classes to all students that focus on supporting students through their college and career planning and social emotional learning as they move through their high school career.

APPENDIX A

Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Frequently Asked Questions – Week of 4/26/21

1. My school has an individual who tests positive for COVID-19 and other students or staff members were within 3-6 feet of that individual for at least fifteen minutes while both parties were masked in a classroom or on the bus. Does my school need to notify the family or staff member that the student or staff member was a close contact?

Yes, the school should notify the family or staff member that they were a close contact; however, they should also clarify that the student or staff member does not have to quarantine. Although the close contact does not have to quarantine, they should get tested, actively monitor for symptoms, and implement the other key health and safety practices. For all other close contacts, please continue to use the standard quarantine protocols found in DESE’s Protocols for COVID-19 Scenarios.

Protocols for responding to COVID-19 scenarios in school, on the bus, or in community settings

Close contacts who were exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom or on the bus while both individuals were masked do not have to quarantine unless they were within 3 feet of distance of the COVID-19 positive individual for a total of 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Also, individuals who are fully vaccinated or who have had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days do not need to quarantine as long as they do not have symptoms.

Quick reference sheet: Key actions for individual COVID-19 events outside school setting

Event	Location of Event	Testing Result	Quarantine
Individual is symptomatic	If an individual is symptomatic <u>at home</u> , they should stay home and get tested.	Individual tests <u>negative</u>	Return to school once 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in symptoms, without the use of fever reducing medications.
	If an individual student is symptomatic <u>on the bus or at school</u> , they should remain masked and adhere to strict physical distancing. Students will then be met by the nurse and stay in the medical waiting room until they can go home. They should not be sent	Individual tests <u>positive</u>	Remain home (except to get medical care), monitor symptoms, notify the school, notify personal close contacts, assist the school in contact tracing efforts, and answer the call from local board of health or MA Community Tracing Collaborative. Most people who have relatively mild illness will need to stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days <u>and</u> until at least 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in other symptoms.

	<p>home on the bus. If an individual staff member is symptomatic at school, they should find coverage for their duties and then go home and get tested.</p>	<p>Individual <u>is not tested</u></p>	<p>Remain home in self-isolation for 10 days from symptom onset, then return once 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in symptoms, without the use of fever reducing medications.</p>
<p>Individual is exposed to COVID-19 positive individual</p> <p><u>Please note:</u> Decisions about who needs to quarantine and for how long may be determined in collaboration with the local board of health and/or the contact tracers.</p>	<p>If an individual is <u>at home</u> when they learn they were in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay at home and be tested 5 days after their last exposure.</p> <p>If an individual is <u>at school</u> when they learn they were in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, they should be masked for the remainder of the day and adhere to strict physical distancing. At the end of the day, they should go home and should not take the bus home. They should stay at home and be tested 5 days after their last exposure.</p>	<p>Individual tests <u>positive</u></p> <p>Individual tests <u>negative or is not tested</u></p>	<p>Remain home (except to get medical care), monitor symptoms, notify the school, notify personal close contacts, assist the school in contact tracing efforts, and answer the call from local board of health or MA Community Tracing Collaborative. Most people who have relatively mild illness will need to stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days <u>and</u> until at least 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in symptoms, without the use of fever reducing medications.</p> <p><u>Please note:</u> Close contacts who were exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom or on the bus while both individuals were masked do not have to quarantine unless they were within 3 feet of distance of the COVID-19 positive individual for a total of 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Also, individuals who are fully vaccinated or who have had confirmed COVID-19 in the last 90 days do not need to quarantine as long as they do not have symptoms.</p> <p>Remain home and self-quarantine consistent with the guidance below:</p> <p>At least 7 days, provided that all of the following are satisfied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are tested (either polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or antigen test) on day 5 or later from their last exposure to the positive individual and receive a negative test result • They have not experienced any symptoms up to this point • They conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14 and self-isolate if new symptoms develop <p>At least 10 days, provided that all of the following are satisfied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have not experienced any symptoms up to this point • They conduct active monitoring through day 14 and self-isolate if new symptoms develop • No test is necessary under this option <p>At least 14 days after the last exposure to the person who tested positive, if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have experienced any symptoms during the quarantine period, even if they have a negative COVID-19 test; or • They are unable to conduct active monitoring of

			<p>symptoms</p> <p><u>Active monitoring requires individuals to actively monitor their symptoms and take temperature once daily. If even mild symptoms develop or the individual has a temperature of 100.0 F, they must immediately self-isolate, and contact the public health authority overseeing their quarantine, and be tested.</u></p>
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APPENDIX B

School Year 2020-21 Reopening Transportation Guidance

July 22, 2020; updated February 11, 2021

Introduction and overview of guidance

This transportation guidance supplements DESE's Initial Fall School Reopening Memo. The initial memo put forth the goal of the safe return of as many students as possible to in-person school settings – *as in-person school is the best way to ensure student learning and continued social and emotional growth*. The safe transportation of students to and from school is a critical part of achieving this goal. In developing this transportation guidance, the health and safety of students and transportation staff remain our top priorities.

This guidance focuses on supporting districts to develop a transportation strategy that provides safe conditions for all students and staff traveling by bus, while also maximizing in-person learning:

1. **Follow the medically-advised health and safety requirements** for school bus transportation summarized below and further described starting on page 7.
2. **Address bus capacity challenges** created by the physical distancing requirements on the school bus by considering strategies such as adding bus routes and staggering schedules if needed.
3. **Take proactive steps to promote safe alternative transportation options** for students, including family-provided transportation, walking, and biking, as appropriate.

The Department developed the fall transportation guidance issued in July through collaboration with infectious disease physicians, pediatricians, and public health experts from Massachusetts General Brigham Health System and the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. We also consulted with the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center's Medical Advisory Board, comprised of physicians and other health experts, which carefully reviewed the health and safety requirements for bus transportation outlined in this document.

This guidance is being updated as of February 11, 2021 with a focus on physical distancing requirements, based on the availability of additional data and after consultation with our medical advisors. In addition, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has reviewed and endorsed the updated guidance. Revisions to this guidance are based on data demonstrating significant air exchanges on moving school buses with open windows (21-43 air exchanges per hour) as well as the continued proven effectiveness of masking. Furthermore, this guidance is differentiated between elementary schools and middle/high schools based on continued evidence that younger students are less likely to become infected and may be less likely to transmit COVID-19.

Schools and districts are encouraged to contact DESE if they would like to discuss individual considerations related to this transportation guidance. Districts should reach out to:

- **Anne Marie Stronach:** Senior Advisor to the Commissioner,

Core health and safety practices

Several core practices will support safe school bus operations this school year:

- **Masks**

All staff and students on the bus, regardless of age, are required to wear masks at all times. Exemptions for students due to medical and/or behavioral reasons – and associated protocols – are further described later in this guidance.
- **Distance**

As of February 2021, physical distancing guidelines and resulting bus capacities have been updated per the below. **Districts may adopt these updated standards only when the required mitigation measures outlined in the rest of this guidance document (wearing masks, opening windows, etc.) are followed.**

In all cases, maximum distance between students should be maintained during boarding and transportation.

 - **Elementary schools:**
 - Capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements for students on buses are lifted.
 - **Middle and high schools:**
 - Capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements for students on buses are lifted, except for middle and high schools in districts with high community prevalence.
 - For middle and high schools in districts with high community prevalence, capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements on buses are amended to allow 2 students per bus bench.
- **Ventilation**

Keep windows open at all times during operation at least two inches. In adverse weather conditions, every other window can be opened. Districts should develop a rain plan to keep students dry when riding the bus in rainy conditions.
- **Seat assignments**

Students should be assigned to a single bus and a particular seat.
- **Bus monitors**

Districts should consider adding a bus monitor (e.g., volunteer, student leader, or staff member) for every bus to ensure strict adherence to these health and safety guidelines.

Transportation planning and surveys

Developing transportation plans

Each district should develop and maintain a **transportation plan** that follows the protocols

outlined in this guidance. Districts should gather input from contracted transportation providers to develop these plans. Drivers and other transportation staff (e.g., bus monitors, if applicable) must be trained on the transportation plan prior to school reopening.

The plan should address the following key areas:

- **Surveying expected ridership** for the school.
- **Modifications to boarding, pick-up, and drop-off protocols**, including a plan for defining bus and seat assignments.
- **Health and safety protocols**, including but not limited to screening, masks, physical distancing, hand hygiene, ventilation, and precautions for bus drivers and monitors.
- Schedules and protocols for **routine cleaning/disinfecting** of vehicles.
- Strategies, protocols, and training specific to **transportation of students with disabilities**, including those who require close contact with adults.
- **Communications and training** for parents/caregivers, students, and staff.
- Strategies for **encouraging alternative modes of transportation**.
- **Addressing any bus capacity challenges through modifications to bus routes and schedules**, including potentially staggering school start and end times for greater bus capacity to enable more students to attend full-time, in-person school.

Surveying families to understand school bus demand

We advise districts to develop a family survey that includes questions on expected bus ridership, if not already conducted. Districts should consider administering the survey more than one time to assess any anticipated increase in ridership in advance of returning more students to in-person school. The survey should proactively encourage parents and caregivers to pursue alternative transportation options when possible.

Districts should consider collecting the following information via surveys:

- How many students will return to school in-person?
- How many families/students are planning to use alternative transportation?
- What offerings/incentives might persuade families to use alternative transportation?
- What modes of alternative transportation will families/students be likely to use (e.g., walking, biking, driving, carpooling)?
- How many households will have two or more students riding the same bus (to plan for family members to be seated together when feasible)?
- Might any students/parents/caregivers be willing to serve as bus monitors and/or carpool drivers?

Effectively addressing bus capacity challenges

If necessary, districts should look for ways to address capacity challenges by adding routes to existing bus runs, staggering start and end times for students, and encouraging families to seek alternative transportation to school when possible.

1. Increase transportation capacity

Strategies to explore

- **Add additional routes to existing bus schedules to increase capacity**, e.g. add a second or third morning route for a given neighborhood with an earlier or later pick up time than existing routes. This strategy will enable districts to increase capacity in a financially feasible manner, without having to add additional buses.
- **This may require districts to stagger school day start and end times** by cohort within schools and/or across the district to accommodate additional routes.
- Further **optimizing bus routes** and increasing **number of buses** available, if feasible.

Key considerations

- Coordinate decisions with transportation departments and contracted transportation providers. Decisions will depend on budget constraints, the ability to shift school and/or transportation schedules, and bus/driver availability.
- Modify and augment school bus pick-up and drop-off procedures to minimize crowding.

2. Increase the number of parents/caregivers who safely transport their students

Strategies to explore

- Encouraging parents/caregivers to **transport their children**
- Encouraging/facilitating **carpooling within fixed cohorts**

Key considerations

- Consider creating or expanding before- and after-school programs to align with parent work schedules to make it easier for families to transport their children.
- Modify and augment pick-up and drop-off procedures to account for increased driver traffic to minimize crowding.
- Inform parents and students about appropriate health and safety guidelines, including the need to wear a mask if transporting students from multiple households and the need to maintain physical distance as is feasible.
- Consider incentives for families to encourage transporting their students.

3. Increase the number of students who safely walk or bike to school

Strategies to explore

- **“Walking school bus” programs** for younger age groups (i.e., groups of children walking to school with adult supervision).
 - Districts/schools can facilitate this directly or encourage parents/caregivers to organize themselves as volunteers, while adhering to appropriate health and safety guidelines.
- Promoting walking/biking through **walk-to-school** or **bike-to-school campaigns**.
- **Partnering with bike share companies** to offer discounts or offer bike subsidies.

Key considerations

- Encourage “walking school bus” programs within consistent student groups or cohorts and/or household members.

- Inform participating parents and students about appropriate health and safety guidelines, including the need to wear a mask at all times and the need to maintain maximum physical distance.
- Engage local police departments when appropriate to help with safety protocols across extended walk zones.
- Prepare for changing transportation patterns (e.g., more crossing guards, bike racks) and work with local authorities as needed.

Other implementation considerations

Seat assignments and boarding

Assigning specific buses, routes, and seats to students and staff in advance will limit potential exposure and make contact tracing easier to conduct. In addition, to prevent crowding and minimize interaction, students and transportation staff should follow the protocols outlined below when entering or exiting the vehicle.

- **Keep bus staffing assignments as static as possible** by assigning drivers and other transportation staff to a single bus and a specific route.
- **Assign students to a single bus and to an assigned seat.** Children from the same household should be assigned seats together. Seating arrangements should also account for students with disabilities who require close contact from adults.
- **As students board the bus, occupy seats starting from the rear of the bus and fill sequentially to the front.** Upon arrival at school, the bus should be unloaded in a controlled manner, starting from the front of the bus and emptying sequentially to the back.
- **Assign seats with the above boarding order and process in mind** (i.e., based on *when* students will board during the route). For example, students boarding the bus at the beginning of the route should be assigned seats at the *rear* of the of the bus, and students boarding the bus at the end of the route should be assigned seats at the front.

Pick-up and drop-off protocols

Modify arrival and departure protocols to limit crowding upon student drop-off and pick-up. District and school leaders should establish policies for student entry and dismissal including a plan for traffic, drop-off, and pick-up that complies with physical distancing guidelines.

- **Consider having one bus of students enter the building at a time.** When weather allows, students who are not entering right away should wait outside, preferably with members of their cohort, in designated areas that are clearly marked for physical distancing.
- **Consider how to schedule students who will walk or bike to school or will be dropped off by car** to limit crowding and support physical distancing.
- **Prepare to respond to changing transportation patterns** (e.g., more crossing guards, bike racks/storage) and work with local authorities as needed.

- **Consider utilizing multiple entry/exit points and pick-up/drop-off locations** (e.g., assign students/grade levels to different entrances at arrival and departure times).
- **Modify protocols for parent/caregiver pick-up and drop-off**
 - Designate appropriate pick-up area(s) for parents/caregivers.
 - Parents/caregivers should remain in their vehicle while waiting for their child.
 - Parents/caregivers should maintain physical distancing standards and wear masks if they exit their vehicle.
- **High schools should consider designating extra parking spots or street spaces for student parking** if surveys show that more students will be using personal vehicles.

Considerations for students with disabilities

Some students with disabilities require specialized transportation as part of their Individualized Education Program (IEP). To reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, districts should work collaboratively with parents of students who are eligible for specialized transportation to determine their ability to transport their child(ren) to and from school.

- **Parents of students for whom special transportation is provided for in their IEPs and who transport their student are eligible for reimbursement**, according to 603 CMR 28.07(6). In these cases, the student maintains the right to access transportation for a disability-related need at a future date. The IEP should not be amended to reflect the temporary change in transportation arrangements, but the family should be notified in writing of this temporary change if they agree to transport their student.
- In cases where special transportation is provided for in the student’s IEP and the family is unable to transport their student, **school districts must coordinate and provide transportation for those students, including students in out-of-district placements.**

Public transportation

Districts should work with their regional transportation authorities if students take public transportation to or from school. Districts should provide health and safety guidelines to students using public transit systems including:

- **Limit touching frequently touched surfaces** such as kiosks, touchscreens, ticket machines, turnstiles, handrails, restroom surfaces, elevator buttons, and benches as much as possible.
- **Wear a mask at all times during transportation.**
- **Follow physical distancing guidelines** by maximizing space between riders as feasible.
- **Practice hand hygiene** (e.g., use hand sanitizer after leaving the transit station or bus stop).
- **When possible, travel during non-peak hours** when there are likely to be fewer people. If you expect a significant number of students within your district to take public transportation, consider adjusting start/end times to avoid rush-hour transit.
- **Check with local transit authorities for the latest information** on changes to services and procedures, especially if additional assistance is required.

Transportation health and safety requirements and related guidance

Bus monitor

To ensure adherence to health and safety guidelines, we encourage districts to consider **adding a bus monitor to every bus**. This role could be a hired position, paraprofessional, current student, staff member, or volunteer, but should not be an individual at high risk for COVID-19. This bus monitor must also adhere to all health and safety guidelines outlined in this memo.

Bus monitor responsibilities may include:

- Asking whether students received **at-home pre-screening** (see “Symptoms screening” below).
- Managing vehicle **entry/exit processes** including directing students to assigned seating.
- Ensuring all **health and safety requirements are met** (e.g., physical distancing, masks, ventilation, hand sanitizer, safe storage of health and safety supplies, etc.).
- Ensuring students are wearing masks properly at all times.
- Coordinating **arrival/departure** and **entry/dismissal protocols**.
- Assisting with **routine cleaning** and **sanitization activities**, as appropriate.

Symptom screening

Checking for symptoms each morning by families and caregivers, before students arrive at the bus stop, is critical and will serve as the primary screening mechanism for COVID-19 symptoms.

- **Bus drivers or bus monitors (if applicable) should be appropriately trained to observe students upon entry.** If students appear symptomatic, and a parent/caregiver is present to take them home, they should not be permitted to enter the school bus. If a parent/caregiver is not present to take them home, bus monitors should refer students who may be symptomatic to the school healthcare point of contact immediately upon arrival.
- **If a student who may be symptomatic must board the vehicle, they should be spaced at least six feet from other students as feasible.** Close off areas used by the student, and do not use those areas again until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- **Consider posting signs at bus entrances clearly indicating that no one may enter if they have symptoms of respiratory illness or fever, and that masks are required at all times on the bus.**
- **If children become sick during the day, they should not be permitted to travel home via school bus.**

Masks

Everyone on the bus and waiting at bus stops must wear masks that cover the nose and mouth at all times.

- **Adults**, including drivers and other transportation staff (e.g., bus monitors), **are required to wear masks.**
- **Students are required to wear masks, regardless of age, when on the bus.**
- **Exceptions to masks for students:** Face shields may be an option for students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks. Please see the “physical distancing” section below for protocols on how to work with families of students who cannot wear masks due to medical, behavioral, or other challenges.
- **Masks should be provided by the student/family**, but districts must ensure that sufficient extra disposable masks are made available on all buses for any student who needs them.

Physical distancing

As of February, 2021, physical distancing guidelines and resulting bus capacities have been updated per the below. **In all cases, maximum distance between students should be maintained during boarding and transportation, and all other safety protocols are still required, including wearing masks and opening windows a couple of inches.**

- **Elementary schools:**
 - Capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements for students on buses are lifted.
- **Middle and high schools:**
 - Capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements for students on buses are lifted, except for middle and high schools in districts with high community prevalence.
 - For middle and high schools in districts with high community prevalence, capacity limitations and physical distancing requirements on buses are amended to allow 2 students per bus bench.

The distancing standards must be implemented in conjunction with strict adherence to health and safety requirements:

- **Students should maintain a minimum of three feet of distance with masks on while waiting at bus stops.** As may be appropriate, consider marking off ground at bus stops to reflect distancing.
- **Children from the same household and same classroom-based cohorts should be seated together when feasible.**
- **Students should face forward at all times** and refrain from eating, shouting, singing, or sharing items while in transit.
- **Determine and post maximum occupancy for each bus, if applicable**, while following distancing guidelines.
- **Students who are not able to wear a mask while riding the bus** should maintain 6 feet of distance between themselves and other students. If possible, the student should wear a face shield while on the bus. Districts should work with the families of students who are regularly unable to wear a mask regarding possible alternative transportation

arrangements (i.e. walking to school or the family transporting the student).

Hand sanitizing

Install hand sanitizer dispensers on buses for students and drivers to clean hands as they board and exit. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol content can be used. Hand sanitizer should be applied to all surfaces of the hands in sufficient quantity that it takes 20 seconds of rubbing hands together for the sanitizer to dry.

- **Hand sanitizer dispensers should be placed only at the entrance of school buses within view of the bus driver or monitor** to ensure appropriate use. Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene (handwashing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school.
- **During winter months, students wearing gloves upon entry should be encouraged to keep gloves on at all times** during transit to the extent possible. If the student wishes to remove the gloves, they should follow the hand sanitizing protocols outlined above upon entry and exit.

Ventilation

Mitigate airborne transmission by increasing outdoor air ventilation. Doing so helps dilute the concentration or displace the presence of an airborne virus. Opening windows can greatly increase the level of ventilation within a school bus and therefore reduce COVID-19 transmission risk.

- **Keep windows open at all times at least two inches during operation.** In adverse weather conditions, every other window can be opened (i.e. first row windows open two inches, second row windows closed, etc.). Districts should develop a rain plan to keep students dry when riding the bus in rainy conditions. Strategies could include:
 - Requesting that families send their students to the bus in full rain gear (and warmer attire, as needed) on rainy days, including hoods and leg protection.
 - Distributing disposable ponchos for any students who need them.
 - Leaving the seats closest to open windows (every other row) empty, if feasible.
- **Consider keeping roof hatches open** on buses during operation for further ventilation, if feasible.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Coordinate with the district transportation department and contracted transportation providers to ensure vehicles are properly cleaned and disinfected. ***At a minimum, high-touch surfaces (see examples below) must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly after each morning route and after each afternoon route using EPA-approved disinfectants.*** The interior of each vehicle must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly at least once each day.

- **Clean high-touch surfaces first and most frequently**, including buttons, handholds, pull cords, window latches, rails, steering wheels, door handles, shift knobs, dashboard controls, and stanchions.

- **Conduct thorough routine cleaning of vehicles**, including dusting and wet-mopping vehicle floors, removing trash, wiping heat and air conditioner vents, spot cleaning walls and seats, dusting horizontal surfaces, cleaning spills, etc.
- **Routine cleaning outlined above should be completed prior to disinfection** to remove all surface matter.
- **Doors and windows should remain open when cleaning the vehicle.**
- **Staff should be trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner** and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills. All sanitizing and disinfecting solutions must be labeled properly to identify the contents and kept out of the reach of students.
- **Drivers and monitors should have adequate supplies** of soap, paper towels, tissues, hand sanitizer, garbage bags, and other critical cleaning supplies.

Precautions for transportation staff

Bus drivers and monitors face potential exposure through close contact with passengers, contact with high-touch surfaces, or by touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. Older individuals and those with serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. To mitigate these risks, all bus drivers and monitors should take the following precautions when transporting students:

- **Avoid touching surfaces** often touched by passengers.
- **Wear masks** covering the nose and mouth at all times.
- **Use gloves if required to touch surfaces contaminated by bodily fluids.**
- **Maintain proper hand hygiene.** Wash hands regularly with soap and water when available for at least 20 seconds and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Don't report for duty if sick.**

APPENDIX C

Guidance on In-Person Learning and Student Learning Time Requirements

April 27, 2021

Summary of Regulatory Change and New Requirements

At the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on March 5, 2021, the Board adopted additional amendments to the Student Learning Time (SLT) regulations, 603 CMR 27.00, on an emergency basis. The amendments establish the Commissioner's authority to determine when district-wide hybrid and remote learning models no longer count for structured learning time. Consistent with the regulations, the amendments prioritize in-person instruction and will result in more students returning to full-time, in-person learning with appropriate school-based mitigation measures in place. The Board will vote on the final adoption of the amendments, with any changes resulting from the public comments, at the Board meeting in May 2021.

In consultation with public health officials and medical experts, the Commissioner has elected to use this authority to expand full-time, in-person learning through a graduated approach this spring. The plan will begin with a return to in-person school for elementary schools grades K-5. With recent significant improvements in COVID-19 health metrics, rigorous implementation of key mitigation strategies, and weekly pooled testing up and running for students and school staff across the Commonwealth, more districts and schools have already started to bring more students back.

- **As of April 5, 2021, the Department requires elementary schools to use a full-time, in-person learning model for instructional hours to count towards structured learning time.**
- **As of April 28, 2021, the Department will require grades 6-8 to use a full-time, in-person learning model for instructional hours to count towards structured learning time.**
- **As of May 17, 2021, the Department will require grades 9-12 to use a full-time, in-person learning model for instruction hours to count towards structured learning time.**

Importantly, families will retain the choice as to whether to send their children to school in-person or have them learn remotely through the end of the school year. Districts may also apply for a waiver from DESE. Waivers will be considered in a limited set of circumstances described later in this document.

These regulations are legally binding. Any district that does not comply with the regulatory requirements or receive a waiver by April 5, 2021 (for the elementary school phase of the plan) will be required to make up any missed structured learning time. **Any district that does not comply with the regulatory requirements or receive a waiver by April 28, 2021 (for grades 6-8) or by May 17, 2021 (for grades 9-12) will be required to make up any missed structured learning time.** This time could be made up during this school year, over the summer, or into next school year if necessary. In addition, G.L. c. 71, § 4A links Chapter 70 funds to structured learning time.

Overview of this Document

This document provides further information to districts about the new requirements and guidance for effective implementation, and is organized into the following sections:

- Background and rationale
- Supports and resources for schools and districts
- Timeline for phased implementation
- Detailed requirements
- Implementation planning
- Waiver process
- Looking ahead

Background and Rationale

In preparation for reopening schools in the fall of 2020, DESE released its initial fall guidance in June. Our initial guidance established a layered set of mitigation strategies to protect against COVID-19 transmission in schools, including masks, hand hygiene, physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting, symptom screening, and contact tracing. We indicated that it was not one factor, but a combination of strategies that would keep our students and staff safe.

As part of this guidance, DESE required districts to prepare plans for three learning models heading into the 2020-21 school year – in-person, hybrid, and remote – while prioritizing in-person models whenever possible. Our expectation was that based on the evolving science and depending on the trajectory of the virus, schools would likely need to pivot among the models. We also modified the required number of school days to provide extra time at the start of the year for school staff to train on reopening models and the key mitigation strategies.

Importantly, 72% of districts in Massachusetts took advantage of the fall months to return to school fully in-person or in a hybrid model. And based on recent SLT survey data, nearly 80% of districts are currently in-person or in a hybrid model as of mid-February 2021.

Schools and districts have rigorously adopted the health and safety strategies outlined in DESE’s guidance and we have seen very few incidences of transmission in schools. In fact, we have an ever-growing body of evidence locally, nationally, and from across the globe that in-person school is safe when proper health and safety protocols are followed.

Since June 2020, DESE guidance has consistently noted that three feet in classrooms is a safe standard for physical distancing when masks are worn and other mitigation strategies are in place, based on guidelines from the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our guidance balanced the urgent need to bring students in the Commonwealth back to in-person learning while minimizing the risk to students, staff, and their families. While districts should space students further than three feet when feasible, evidence demonstrates that the additional risk reduction associated with six feet as opposed to three feet is low – when masks are worn and other mitigation strategies are in place.

DESE’s approach to physical distancing was endorsed last summer by the Governor’s COVID Command Medical Advisory board, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and medical experts from Mass General Brigham.

Since then, DESE’s approach has been further endorsed and validated, with numerous groups noting the safety of a three-foot distancing in classrooms standard and supporting the return of students to full-time in-person school at three feet of distance:

- Additional organizations have noted the safety of a three-foot distancing standard between students in classrooms when part of a holistic mitigation approach in school.
- Individual school districts have formed their own medical advisory boards and conducted their own due diligence, reaching with similar conclusions about the safety of reduced physical distancing.
- Recently, hundreds of Massachusetts infectious diseases physicians, pediatricians, and public health experts, endorsed DESE’s guidance on three feet of physical distancing in classrooms, noting that the risks to students of not being in school are dramatic.
- In March 2021, a peer-reviewed study published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* demonstrated that districts in Massachusetts using a physical distancing standard of three feet in classrooms did not see an increased number of COVID-19 positive cases, as compared to districts that maintained a strict six feet of distance.

In the fall, we began adding further layers to the school-based mitigation strategies through COVID-19 testing and reporting practices. We implemented mobile rapid response testing and BinaxNOW rapid antigen testing for symptomatic individuals in schools. We also began publicly reporting the case rates in K-12 settings.

In January 2021, we announced that pooled testing would be universally available across the Commonwealth for all students and staff, starting with a state-funded initial phase that began in February. Approximately 50% of schools across the Commonwealth have signed up to administer pooled testing on a weekly basis to proactively screen large numbers of students and staff for COVID-19. Participating schools can now quickly locate and isolate any individuals that test positive.

As of April 19th, all individuals who are 16 years or older are eligible to schedule appointments to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. All educators and school staff have been eligible to be vaccinated since March 11, 2021, and vaccinations for persons 65 and older and those at risk of severe COVID-19 due to comorbidities have been eligible to be vaccinated since earlier this spring. Even with strong evidence that in-person school environments are safe with existing mitigation strategies, and while vaccinations are not a prerequisite for returning to in-person instruction, all eligible individuals are strongly encouraged to receive the vaccine to provide additional confidence in returning to the classroom.

In recent months, we have also focused on the student learning experience in remote and hybrid settings. In December, to address increasing reports of troubling student mental health trends, the Board voted to amend the SLT regulations to require districts to further prioritize “live instruction,” whether through in-person or synchronous remote learning. These emergency regulations went into effect for schools and districts on January 19, 2021 and were permanently adopted at the Board’s February meeting. These requirements for live and synchronous instruction will support student engagement and mental health until students return to the classroom full-time.

As we have stated repeatedly throughout this pandemic, there is no substitute for in-person learning, especially for younger students, students with disabilities, English learners, and other high needs populations. In addition to academic instruction and support, when students are in school, they have the opportunity to learn important social and emotional skills, and they have access to mental health and other support services, as well as healthy meals and opportunities for exercise.

With the extensive mitigation strategies in place in our schools, including further validation of our guidance on physical distancing, widely-available pooled testing, and as state health metrics continue to improve, the time is now to begin shifting away from remote and hybrid learning models and return to the in-person instructional format.

In addition, a return to in-person school this spring will lay the groundwork for a full-time, in-person return for all grade levels in fall 2021, likely with some continued mitigation measures. In the fall, DESE will no longer require districts and schools to provide a district-wide remote learning option. Districts should work individually with parents/guardians of students who cannot attend school in person in the fall due to a medical condition.

Supports and Resources for Schools and Districts

At the start of the pandemic, we recognized that planning, preparation, and implementation would come at a significant cost and advocated early for much-needed additional funding for schools. Beginning in summer 2020, hundreds of millions of federal and state dollars were made available to districts.

Specifically, DESE distributed \$194.4 million through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER I) Fund and \$182 million in School Reopening grants were issued last summer. DESE also provided nearly \$33 million to address remote learning technology needs and to provide students with adequate access to technology, including devices (e.g., Chromebooks), internet connectivity (e.g., Wi-Fi hotspots), and assistive technology, for use in remote learning environments during the 2020-21 school year. DESE has also provided districts and schools with additional supplies, including personal protective equipment, masks, and air purifiers. To date, DESE has distributed over 12,000 air purifiers and 1.5 million masks.

The additional \$740 million federal stimulus funds (ESSER II) announced in December 2020, and the Governor's proposed budget which fully funds the Student Opportunity Act, will enable districts to plan not just for immediate needs but also for long-term recovery and student acceleration. As part of the ESSER II package, DESE has committed additional resources to ensure that each district will receive a minimum of \$75,000 in ESSER II funds. DESE has also distributed \$4 million in supplemental funding to assist with the social and emotional needs of students. An even larger distribution of federal funds is expected as part of the pending American Rescue Plan.

Additionally, DESE continues to provide resources for districts and schools to hire additional staff to support an in-person return including: emergency license opportunities, MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) database partnership for substitute teachers, and the high school internship program.

Finally, DESE's COVID-19 rapid response help center has been in place since the fall to support districts and schools with reopening questions, provide guidance on managing positive COVID-19 cases in schools through DESE's protocols, and providing operational guidance and support. The help center will continue to be available, including onsite, to support districts and schools in expanding the number of students engaged in full-time, in-person learning this spring. For schools and districts seeking additional support, contact SLTsupport@mass.gov.

Timeline for Phased Implementation

With the authority to determine when remote and hybrid learning models no longer count towards structured learning time hours, the Commissioner has laid out a graduated strategy for providing all students with the opportunity to return to full-time, in-person learning this spring, beginning with elementary students.

We encourage schools and districts to bring back students at each grade level as quickly as possible. With pooled testing in place and improvement in COVID-19 health metrics across the state, many

districts and schools are already moving to bring back all students K-12 for full-time, in-person learning in the coming weeks. However, the timeline below represents the requirement for full-time return for districts that would not otherwise have students back by the dates below at each grade level.

With this timeline, DESE aims to steadily increase the number of students learning in-person for the remainder of the school year. The plan unfolds in phases, allowing us to assess implementation and health indicators before moving to the next phase. During these phases, we will work in close collaboration with state health officials and medical experts to monitor case counts in schools, assess public health metrics, and monitor for potential impacts of the COVID-19 variants. In addition, we will seek feedback from district and school leaders on implementation. Ultimately, the Commissioner will confirm the timeline for proceeding to subsequent phases based on the review of these data points and other relevant findings from implementation, and following written notice to the Board.

We know COVID-19 positive individuals will be identified in schools, as has been the case throughout the school year. However, districts and schools are well-equipped with the necessary protocols to effectively manage these cases and prevent in-school transmission, including the testing, contact tracing, and quarantine procedures found in DESE guidance.

In reviewing the timeline below, please note that districts and schools may apply for a waiver from DESE, and parents/guardians who wish for their children to learn remotely will still have that option. Schools and districts must have robust and reliable ways to communicate with all families, students, teachers, and staff to send and receive key messages related to the timelines below. To the greatest extent possible, districts and schools should give families, remote enrichment learning programs, and the broader community at least a two-week notice of planned changes to their school schedules.

- **Elementary school phase (grades K-5):** Districts and schools are required to shift their learning model for elementary school grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week effective **Monday, April 5, 2021**.
- **Middle school phase (grades 6-8):** Districts and schools will be required to shift their learning model for middle school grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week, effective **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**. Districts may choose to ask students who have traveled to a state on the restricted list to learn remotely for the week of April 26, 2021 (the week after April vacation).
- **High school phase (grades 9-12):** Districts and schools will be required to shift their learning model for high school grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week, effective **Monday, May 17, 2021**. Districts and schools should make every effort to have high school students with significant and complex disabilities or high school students who are English learners return to full-time in person learning as soon as possible.

Detailed Requirements

Below are key requirements and other information necessary for implementation.

Survey families to determine their choice between full in-person and remote learning, if they have not already done so this spring. As the new requirements take effect for each phase (elementary, middle, and high school), parent/guardians have the option to choose full in-person or remote learning for

their students. These options apply whether the students are currently in remote learning, hybrid, or in-person learning. **The family surveys should be conducted as soon as possible for all students K-12,** and districts should make every effort to reach all families.

For many districts, this will be a substantial programming shift mid-school year. Families should expect that districts may need to make challenging tradeoffs to accommodate the full in-person instructional mode. For instance, if students are currently learning in a hybrid model, the shift to more in-person days may require changes in classroom learning spaces and, in some cases, teacher-student assignments. If students are currently in a remote model or choose to learn remotely when these new requirements go into effect, the remote learning option may look different than the model offered prior to the implementation of these new requirements.

After families make a choice between full in-person and remote, a parent or guardian who subsequently wishes to have their student switch from a remote to in-person model, should be aware that the school or district may require a reasonable transition period. Consistent with DESE’s Remote Learning Guidance, we recommend that this transition period be ideally no more than four to six weeks.

We encourage districts to use a “livestreaming” or simultaneous instructional model for remote students. In this model, students learning at home participate in largely the same classroom activities as students who are learning in-person. This will continue to allow students to access remote learning if they need to quarantine this spring due to a COVID-19 related issue.

Applicable elementary grades. The requirement for full-time, in-person learning for elementary schools applies to all grades K-5 within a district or school. However, if districts or schools have one or more school building configurations of K-4, they may request a waiver from DESE to delay the implementation of full-time, in-person learning for grade 5 until the middle school implementation timeline begins.

Districts that have school building configurations of grades K-6, K-7, or K-8 may similarly opt to accelerate their implementation of full-time, in-person instruction in grades 6, 7, and 8, or they may choose to begin with K-5 and keep upper grades learning in hybrid or remote models.

Pre-kindergarten grades are not required to meet these new standards, though districts are encouraged to plan for a return to in-person learning for pre-kindergarten as soon as possible.

Definition of full-time in-person learning. The requirement for “full-time” in-person learning means that **all structured learning time hours (on average 5 hours per day of structured learning time at the elementary level and 5.5 hours per day at the secondary level) are required to be delivered in-person, five days per week.** This will generally mean that students are attending a full school day equivalent to the length of their school day pre-pandemic. Any deviation from offering full-time, in-person instruction five days a week to all students requires a waiver.

Students can still learn remotely and have their hours count towards SLT in two “exception cases.” First, as noted above, parents/guardians may choose to have their students learn remotely through the end of this school year, and the learning hours for these students will continue to count towards structured learning time. Second, following DESE COVID-19 health protocols, individual students may need to isolate or quarantine and therefore learn remotely if they are symptomatic, diagnosed with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone who tests positive. In these cases, where the district is following the DESE COVID-19 health protocols and students are learning remotely due to a COVID-19-related issue, learning hours will also continue to count towards structured learning time.

As noted in DESE’s Updated Guidance on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Health Metrics issued in November, schools should remain open at all levels of community prevalence and districts and schools should follow DESE’s COVID-19 protocols in effectively managing any COVID-19 cases in schools. There are processes already in place to effectively manage any COVID-19 cases in schools, including contact tracing to isolate any positive individuals and their close contacts and working with the local board of health to determine if it is likely that there is transmission happening in school. Districts and schools must continue to consult with DESE’s COVID-19 rapid response help center and the local board of health prior to shifting to remote learning within a classroom, grade, school or district due to suspected in-school transmission.

School committee vote. Because the regulations have the force of law, once the Commissioner makes the determination that hybrid and remote learning will no longer count towards structured learning time, a school committee vote on which learning model to adopt is not necessary because full-time, in-person learning will be the default required model. Remote learning should be provided only if parents/guardians opt out of in-person learning for the remainder of this school year and for students who must remain home due to a COVID-19 related issue. If a district intends to submit a waiver request, DESE encourages the district to hold a school committee vote on the content of the waiver, but this is a local decision. Given the need for rapid implementation, superintendents may submit a waiver request to DESE without having first secured a school committee vote.

Coordination with remote learning enrichment centers and other community providers currently supporting remote learning. Districts and schools should coordinate closely with remote learning enrichment centers and community-based programs that have been providing student support services during the regular school day. Districts should endeavor to notify all such providers at least two weeks prior to the implementation of any planned changes to the school schedule, to ensure parents continue to have access to the wrap-around care they need to return to work.

Districts and schools should work with community-based providers to plan for effective transitions to enable the continuity of services for children whose parents opt to keep them in a remote learning environment through the remainder of the school year. Districts and schools are encouraged continue to build partnerships with community providers to enable sufficient access to critical wrap-around services, complement and strengthen expanded summer learning opportunities, and maintain capacity for on-going early education and out-of-school-time needs for families across the district. Districts may also seek feedback from these programs, with parental consent, on student needs and developmental challenges.

Implementation Planning

Student Supports

When these new requirements go into effect in early April, some schools and districts will be returning students to in-person learning for the first time this school year. In such instances, students and families may require additional supports to successfully make this transition, particularly for students with disabilities, students who experience anxiety and mental health issues, and other vulnerable populations. DESE recommends that schools and districts take additional steps to prepare such students and families so they can take full advantage of the opportunities for learning and socialization that in-person instruction will create, including:

- **Family engagement is a critical component of school reopening.** It is essential to reach out to parents/guardians and promote ongoing engagement in a manner that works for the family. DESE strongly recommends that schools and districts continue to cultivate excellent two-way

communication with families. All written and oral communication must be provided in the primary language of the home and in language that is understandable to the general public.

- **Parental input is always valuable but is particularly critical during this time when parents/guardians may have unique insight into their child’s remote learning experience.** Input from parents/guardians on their child’s primary areas of need, including their child’s engagement, attention, behavior, progress, skills, home experiences, and other observations about their emotional and social well-being, are critical to determining how to meet students’ needs.
- **Schools and districts should partner with parents/guardians to support a smooth transition to re-opening of school,** with physical distancing and other health and safety protocols as well as new schedules. It is particularly important that educators work closely with parents/guardians of students who experience difficulty with changes in routine (for example, students with autism or students who experience anxiety). Schools and districts should consider strategies such as creating individualized social stories, recording tours of new buildings or programs, conducting virtual tours, holding a “meet and greet” for teachers with their students, or providing opportunities for students to ride new bus routes and visit new school buildings in person before the resumption of in-person learning.
- **Schools and districts should continue to create safe and supportive learning environments that encourage positive behavior.** Schools should proactively implement direct instruction and additional supports for school- and class-wide routines, social skills instruction, and other preventive measures. Schools and districts should utilize disciplinary action as a last resort for students exhibiting behavioral challenges.
- **Additional de-escalation training and/or training on trauma-sensitive practices for all staff including school resource officers may be needed** to support the transition back to full-time in-person learning modified for health and safety needs, and the potential of increased behavioral concerns.
- **IEP teams must ensure that a free appropriate public education is provided to all students with disabilities.** Whether the primary instructional delivery is in-person learning or remote learning, students with disabilities must receive all services in accordance with their IEP.
- **Finally, schools and districts are required to include a visual component as part of the daily “live check-in” that is needed to support students whose families have selected a remote model of instruction for the remainder of the school year.** As provided in the definition of remote learning in the Department’s regulations, remote learning requires that students have opportunities to interact with a teacher each school day. The daily live check-in provides the district with key information about student engagement and well-being. The Department is now updating its guidance to require using video conferencing or other methods of seeing students as part of the daily live check-in. Schools and districts need to assess how to use video conferencing in a way that is respectful of individual student’s needs. For example, if a student is reluctant to be seen in their home by classmates, a teacher might meet with the student in a breakout room with a virtual background for a short period of time to conduct the live check-in. In situations where the district or school has concerns about a student’s attendance or level of engagement, they should employ additional levels of support to re-engage the student. For more information about promoting student engagement and safety, please see DESE’s guidance on Promoting Student Engagement, Learning, Wellbeing and Safety.

Facilities and Operations

As noted, DESE’s initial fall reopening guidance explicitly endorsed a full return to classrooms following health and safety protocols, including three feet of distance between students in classrooms when masks are worn and other mitigation strategies are in place. **We encourage districts to revisit this guidance as**

they plan for a full-time return this spring. DESE’s facilities and operations guidance will also serve as a helpful resource for building configuration and space planning work.

As a reminder, we recently issued **updated transportation guidance that significantly expanded bus capacity.**

In addition, **we updated our face mask guidance to require masks at all grade levels, unless students receive a medical or behavioral exemption.** Previously, masks were strongly encouraged in grades 1 and below, but not required.

We recognize that, at this point, the critical constraint most districts are facing in bringing more students back for in-person instruction is physical distancing. Below are some important points to keep in mind regarding physical distancing and space configuration. In consultation with state health officials and medical experts, DESE will provide periodic updates to these guidelines.

In general, districts and schools should review a wide range of options for serving all students full-time, in-person with physical distancing constraints:

- Classroom capacity should be assessed first, followed by other spaces in the school that could be repurposed at different times of the day, including the cafeteria, gym, art and music rooms, and other spaces. Classroom configurations including layout and furniture may need to be altered to accommodate all students.
- Some teachers, including specialist teachers, may be able to utilize carts and deliver lessons in students’ homerooms, thereby freeing up additional classroom space and allowing students to remain in cohorts. In some cases, shifts in teacher assignments may also be required.
- Use of outdoor spaces at the school should be maximized, including putting up tents so these spaces can be used in rainy weather.
- If indoor and outdoor spaces at the school-level are insufficient, districts should look at other spaces not otherwise used by students within the district, if available, and then consider spaces within the broader community. For instance, individual grade levels within a school could be moved to local community spaces, including non-profits, businesses, or other spaces, to expand the physical footprint of classroom space.

Classroom set-up and required physical distancing:

- **As a reminder, our guidance is to set up classrooms with desks at least three feet apart, with students facing the same direction.** The three feet distance is measured “seat edge to seat edge” front to back and side to side.
 - Having students face the same direction should be the default desk set-up in the classroom.
 - However, for short periods of time (e.g. 15-20 minutes several times per day), students may face each other for a “turn and talk” or other group activity. During these short periods, students should refrain from singing or engaging in activities that involve increased respiration. Appropriate mask use should be verified before these short periods.
- **Please see DESE’s facilities and operations guidance for further suggestions on classroom set-up and maximizing space for students.**
- **In elementary schools, if the typical classroom configuration is tables with students facing one another,** consider the following strategies to fit students at three feet apart in classrooms:
 - Replace tables with individual desks, if feasible.

- Reduce the number of students at each table and relocate additional students to another area of the classroom, if feasible. For example, for tables that typically seat four students, one pair of students sits together at the table in the morning and then shifts to the rug for the afternoon, while another pair of students starts on the rug and shifts to the table in the afternoon.
- Have all students at the table face in one direction, at least three feet apart, with the students facing away from the table using clipboards or lap desks. Again, the pair using clipboards or lap desks could switch with the other pair at the table halfway through the day.

Meal set-up and required physical distancing:

- **During meals, and any other time students and adults are not wearing masks, districts and schools must plan for a strict six feet of physical distance between individuals.**
- **Consider the following strategies to increase physical space for meals:**
 - Add additional meal periods to reduce the number of students in the cafeteria during each session. (This may include shortening lunch periods.)
 - Have students eat meals in the classroom. (If classroom space is set up with three feet of distance between seats, have the other half of the class eat in another area.)
 - Alternate students between recess and lunch to reduce classroom or cafeteria capacity during meals (e.g., half the students eat lunch while the other half attend recess).
 - Repurpose other space as meal areas including gyms, art rooms, or music rooms (depending on the scheduling of specials, this may require teachers to utilize carts for part of the day).
 - Set up eating areas outside, including in tents. This could expand cafeteria capacity or could provide an alternative space for students eating meals in classrooms (e.g., half the students stay in their classroom; the other half eat in the tents).
 - Replace café tables with desks in the cafeteria to increase capacity at six feet of distancing.
- **Consider the following strategies for increasing staffing to cover meal periods:**
 - To provide sufficient staff to monitor students during meals, repurpose paraprofessionals, other support staff, school administrators, or hire lunch monitors (bus company monitors or crossing guards may be available, high school student interns, parent volunteers, etc.).
 - To have teachers supervise meals in classroom, schedule teachers’ duty-free lunch at the end of the day and allow for a 30-minute early release.
- **Please see DESE’s facilities and operations guidance for further suggestions on lunchroom set-up. DESE will continue to collaborate with school and district leaders to collect and share effective strategies for lunchroom set-up.**

Physical distancing at other times of the day:

- **At all other times (passing time, transitions, etc.), students should maintain physical distance from one another as feasible, and follow the guidelines below.** More information can be found in DESE’s facilities and operations guidance:
 - Ensure that students keep their masks on properly.
 - Ensure that students do not congregate in the hallways or other spaces. During transition periods, we encourage all teachers and staff to monitor students (e.g., from doorways) to keep students moving.

- Schools should continue to stagger transitions as feasible and students should not use lockers (or locker use should be staggered) to prevent congregation.
- Schools should continue not to host visitors to the extent possible.
- Use signage and other markers to remind students and staff to follow proper health and safety protocols, to indicate direction of travel and to encourage physical distancing.
- To account for increased volume of students during passing time, schools may consider increasing installations of hand sanitizer, while ensuring hand sanitizer use is appropriately monitored with younger students.
- Allow students to use the bathroom during class time to reduce bathroom use during transition times, and otherwise using a bathroom sign-out system to reduce the number of students in the bathroom at one time.

Teacher and staff spaces and protocols:

- **In many studies, adult-to-adult transmission has been more common than transmission between adults and students in schools. While teachers and other adults should always remain vigilant implementing the health and safety mitigation strategies, they should be especially careful not to relax their mitigation measures during duty-free periods or other times students may not be present (e.g., preparation periods, common planning time, professional development, etc.).** Consider the following strategies for these circumstances:
 - Ensure strict use of masks when adults are present together.
 - Reconfigure staff furniture to support physical distancing.
 - Consider adjusting staff schedules or creating adult occupancy thresholds to limit the number of adults in a room at one time.
 - Encourage the use of virtual staff meetings where feasible, as opposed to gathering in-person. For in-person staff meetings or gatherings, do not provide food which can lead to the removal of masks.
 - During duty-free lunch periods, encourage staff to eat outside or individually in their classrooms.
- **Teachers and staff should maintain six feet of distance from students and other staff when feasible. For short periods of time (e.g., helping a student individually, walking between desks, etc.), teachers and other staff may be less than six feet away from others.**

We recognize that planning for these configurations and protocols is not simple and that building configurations vary. At the same time, nearly all communities have already returned to full-time in-person learning at the elementary level, and many at the middle and high school levels, demonstrating that it is possible.

DESE's COVID-19 help center is available to serve as a thought partner to any district or school that is challenged by space constraints. Contact SLTsupport@mass.gov to request this support.

Waiver Process

The recent student learning time amendments include that upon the written request of a school or district leader, the **Commissioner may, in his discretion, grant a waiver for a limited set of circumstances in which districts make a compelling case that they must take an incremental approach to implementation of these requirements.** Any deviation from offering full-time, in-person instruction five days a week to all students requires a waiver request.

As noted in earlier sections of this document, schools have been open for in-person learning safely, even in communities with high prevalence, with adherence to required COVID-19 mitigation strategies. In

addition, COVID-19 case rates across the Commonwealth have decreased significantly since January 2021 and elementary, middle, and high schools have safely re-opened for full in-person learning. **As such, we do not anticipate granting waivers for reasons of high community prevalence of COVID-19.**

Waiver duration: Waivers will be approved for a limited time only. All requests for waivers must include a timeline in which all students within a phase would have access to full-time, in-person instruction this school year (i.e., identify the week full-time, in-person instruction would begin).

Examples of Possible Elementary and Middle School Waiver Requests (where districts and schools must make a compelling case that they must take an incremental approach to implementation):

1. Schools and districts that have been primarily in a fully remote model all year can submit a waiver if they need additional time to return all students to full-time, in-person instruction (for instance seeking first to return in a hybrid model, before proceeding to full in-person instruction later in this school year). **Districts must include a timeline and date in which all students within a phase would have access to full-time, in-person instruction this school year.**
2. Schools that operate with a grades K-4 configuration, with grade 5 in another school building, can submit a waiver to delay implementation of full-time, in-person learning for grade 5 at those buildings until the middle school phase begins.
3. In very limited circumstances, waivers may be considered for operational constraints and feasibility issues, on a temporary basis. Schools and districts considering submitting a waiver for issues related to facilities and space constraints should review the “Implementation Planning” section of this document as well as DESE’s facilities and operations guidance. If districts and schools are still in need of support, please email SLTsupport@mass.gov. We will set up consultations, including onsite, with districts to assess how they can implement these requirements. **These consultations with DESE will be required before the Commissioner will approve any waivers in this area.**

Waivers will not be granted for districts that indicate they cannot return to in-person learning due to space constraints or feasibility issues but are maintaining a physical distancing standard in classrooms of greater than three feet. Districts must also have completed an updated survey of families with the information about those students have elected to return to in-person instruction and those who have elected to learn remotely.

In addition, in those limited circumstances where a district is granted a waiver, the **waiver will be time limited. All districts and schools should expect that they will need to change their models to move closer to full-time, in-person learning five days per week.**

Finally, if districts can bring some – but not all – of their schools back to full in-person learning within a given phase (e.g. four out of six elementary schools), they should proceed with a full return for those schools and submit a waiver to continue working on plans for the others.

4. Other requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of Possible High School Waiver Requests (where districts and schools must make a compelling case that they must take an incremental approach to implementation):

1. In very limited circumstances, waivers may be considered for operational constraints and feasibility issues, on a temporary basis.

Schools and districts considering submitting a waiver for issues related to facilities and space constraints should review the “Implementation Planning” section of this document as well as DESE’s facilities and operations guidance. If districts and schools are still in need of support, please email SLTsupport@mass.gov. We will set up consultations, including onsite, with districts to assess how they can implement these requirements. **These consultations with DESE will be required before the Commissioner will approve any waivers in this area.**

Waivers will not be granted for districts that indicate they cannot return to in-person learning due to space constraints or feasibility issues but are maintaining a physical distancing standard in classrooms of greater than three feet. Districts must also have completed an **updated survey of families** with the information about those students who have elected to return to in-person instruction and those who have elected to learn remotely.

Finally, if districts can bring some – but not all – of their schools back to full in-person learning within a given phase (e.g. four out of six high schools), they should proceed with a full return for those schools and submit a waiver to continue working on plans for the others.

2. Other requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Waiver Submission Details

Any request for a waiver should be addressed from the district or school leader (e.g., superintendent or executive director) to the Commissioner and submitted by email to SLTsupport@mass.gov.

In order for districts and schools to receive a timely response prior to the respective elementary, middle, and high school implementation dates:

- Elementary school waiver requests must be submitted to DESE by Monday, March 22, 2021 at 5pm
- Middle school waiver requests must be submitted to DESE by Monday, April 12, 2021 at 5pm
- High school waiver requests must be submitted to DESE by Monday, May 10, 2021 at 5pm

Districts may also submit waivers for the elementary and middle school phases together, by the elementary school deadline. The Department will respond to waiver requests on a rolling basis, and we encourage districts to submit as soon as possible. **Districts and schools will receive a response within five business days of submitting a waiver request.**

The request must include the following information:

- Identification of the district or school(s) requesting the waiver;
- Description of the specific requested waiver, including the physical distancing standard used in the district, the results of the family survey regarding the number of students who would be returning in-person vs. learning remotely, and the timeline in which all students within a phase would have access to in-person, full-time instruction this school year;
- Rationale for the request, including a full description of the circumstances justifying the request;
- Point of contact and phone number.

Looking Ahead

Returning all students to the classroom full-time this school year is a crucial step to stem student learning loss. At the same time, we must also focus on recovery and acceleration, especially for students most in need of intensive support. Plans for recovery and acceleration must initially focus on near-term efforts in 2021, including enhanced student supports this spring, opportunities for summer learning, and planning for a strong start to the fall. However, given pervasive student needs and the availability of significant financial resources across several fiscal years, we must ultimately craft a plan for multi-year recovery efforts.

Later this spring, we will release further information related to summer recovery and acceleration and fall planning. DESE intends to provide the following resources and supports, among others:

- **Spring:** DESE will provide student supports this spring in key areas, including increased mental health supports, FAFSA completion, and support for seniors who did not meet the Competency Determination.
- **Summer:** DESE will stand up robust summer school programming and academic interventions, which will include a state-wide acceleration academy program with a focus on “gateway grades.” DESE will select key grades and focus areas (e.g. early literacy, middle grades math), and work with districts to provide a multi-year opportunity for students to attend an academy program this summer. In addition, DESE will support districts in identifying high-quality programs to serve students in other grades. For planning purposes, DESE recommends that summer programs, including extended school year programs, be provided in-person for all student groups.
- **Fall:** DESE anticipates a full in-person return across all grade levels. We will work with districts and schools to ensure a focus on teaching grade level content, with appropriate scaffolds for all learners. We will also support districts in meeting the needs of the whole child, including mental and physical health, in addition to accelerated instruction and extra help in core academic subjects. More guidance on fall planning will be forthcoming.
 - As we stated last spring heading into the 2020-21 school year, DESE discourages retaining students at the prior grade level. This includes students of first grade age whose parents/guardians may have kept them home from kindergarten this year; these students should be placed in the first grade in the fall, even if they chose to remain unenrolled for kindergarten.

In addition, we remain committed to the Commissioner’s *Our Way Forward* plan, which will support our post-COVID-19 instructional focus and strengthen teaching and learning statewide. This includes promoting deeper learning through engaging and relevant performance tasks and revamping student assessment through our innovative science assessment pilot program.

We have much work ahead to support the return to full-time, in-person school for all students and begin the process of recovery and acceleration. We commend your efforts and look forward to partnering with district and school leaders, school committees, educators and school staff, families, and other stakeholders on behalf of students.

APPENDIX D

MIAA Rules Modifications & Guidelines

Lacrosse - Girls Spring 2021

General Information

Every school district/program should consult with their local health department to determine which risk level to start this program safely. Continued consultation with the local health department should be used to determine when progression to the next risklevel can be initiated.

Playing sports come with inherent risks (twisted ankles to concussions). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional risks to group activities/sports. The MIAA has developed these modifications to lower risks from COVID-19 using National and State guidelines and input from medical specialists. Playing any sport (even with modified play) will continue to carry some risk of acquiring COVID-19 but these modifications were developed to help guide schools in best practices to limit exposure while offering an opportunity for interscholastic athletics for those sports approved for EEA Level 3 participation. The Mass Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) categorizes sports as: “Lower Risk”, “Moderate Risk”, “Higher Risk”. These categories are based on how the sport is traditionally played. Additional information can be found on their website: [EEA Youth and Amateur Sports Resources](#)

This document is to be utilized in compliance with all EEA, DESE and DPH guidelines in place.

Learn more about participation in athletics during the pandemic by taking the free NFHS online course: [“COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators](#)

Mitigation of COVID-19 Spread:

It is important to note that COVID-19 infection related to youth sports seems to spread from outside the field play. Coaches are encouraged to remind athletes about mitigation strategies including distancing and mask wearing. Athletes are encouraged to support the active cooperation of all students within the school community by adhering to social distancing and mask wearing in all settings.

Pre-Workout/Pre-Contest Screening:

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program

may not attend practices or games if they are isolated for illness or quarantined for exposure to infection

Prior to attending practices or games, athletes and coaches should check their temperature. If a student-athlete or a coaching staff member has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or above, they should not attend practices or games. Likewise if they have any other symptoms of COVID-19 infection (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), they should not attend practices or games. Student-athletes and coaches who have symptoms of COVID-19 infection should test and isolate in accordance with DPH guidance.

For students with symptoms who test negative for COVID-19 infection, they may return to sport once they are approved to return to school (when afebrile for 24 hours and symptomatically improved).

Student-athletes and coaches who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should refrain from exercise for ten days from symptom onset. Procedures for return to activity/play should follow CDC, DPH, and local board of health guidelines (CDC link above). In addition, persons with COVID-19 infection need to receive written clearance from their health care provider and school administrator/designee to return to sport. Return to activity should be slow and graded.

The links below are examples of Graduated Return to Play protocols. These examples are not required protocols mandated by the MIAA, rather resources for information.

[British Journal of Sports Medicine Infographic](#)
[MA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program who were exposed to COVID-19 must quarantine, including no participation in practices or games following exposure, and should follow all CDC, DPH, and local board of health protocols. Athletes and coaches should receive written clearance from their school administrator/designee to return to sport.

Should a player be quarantined because of a COVID-19 designation, he/she must participate in a minimum of one practice before returning to interscholastic competition. Should a player being quarantined because of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 the ATC/Athletic Director should consider a more extensive return-to-play protocol for the individual player(s). It is necessary for all athletes to complete all other state guidelines.

COVID-19 Testing:

Recent developments in COVID-19 testing have become more prevalent within the Commonwealth. For Higher Risk sports, the use of COVID-19 testing may help to support the continued participation throughout the entire season of play.

Cohorts and/or Participants:

A record should be kept of all individuals present at team activities i.e. – practices, practice cohorts, competitions, etc.

Weather Resources:

Extreme caution should be exercised when making decisions to participate in athletics when temperatures may present challenges to athletes' health and safety. The following links will help to offer information in planning for safe practice and play during extreme temperature conditions.

- [MIAA Heat Modification Policy](#)
- [MIAA SMC Cold Weather Reference Document](#)
- [NATA: Environmental Cold Injuries](#)
- [NFHS: Participating in Cold Weather – Minimizing the Risk](#)
- [NFHS: Guidelines for Competition in the Cold](#)

Social Distancing:

- Practice – Coaches are responsible for ensuring social distancing is maintained between players as much as possible. This includes additional spacing between athletes while stretching, warming up, chatting, changing drills, etc. Athletes must maintain spacing, and there should be no congregating of athletes while running drills. Workouts, when possible could be conducted in 'pods' of athletes, with the same 5-10 athletes always working out together. Ideally athletes should not move between pods for the entire season. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection. Records should be kept of who is in each group, each day.
- Locker Rooms –Locker rooms and changing areas must follow current EEA Guidance ([EEA Guidance Page 8](#)), except for toilet facilities. Facility Operators should ensure that users can abide by capacity restrictions and social distancing standards and establish signage and visual guidelines. Signage should remind users to limit time spent in enclosed area. If locker rooms are utilized, staggered use based on time and distance is recommended.

When possible, students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower, clean clothing, and equipment at the end of every workout.

- Benches – No benches should be used during practice. Players' items should be separated as below for personal items, at least 6 feet apart. Benches should be permitted only during games with six feet of distancing required between participants. ([EEA Guidance Page 9](#))

- **Playing Surface Access** – Only essential personnel are permitted on the practice/competition field. These are defined as athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainers, and officials (competition). All others (i.e., managers, photographers, media, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field of play.
- **Personal Items** – It is recommended that each athlete bring their own gym bag for personal items (see gym bag information below). All personal items should remain in the gym bag when not in use. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice.
- **Huddles** – Social distancing (6 feet between individuals) must be maintained, and face coverings utilized at all times. Communicating with smaller groups is preferred. Huddles may not occur in locker rooms.
- **Team Handshakes** – Athletes shall NOT exchange handshakes before, during or following practices and competitions. Some MIAA sport specific modifications suggest sportsmanship recognition practices which replace handshakes.
- **Spectators** – Spectators must practice social distancing between different household units and accept personal responsibility for public health guidelines. The number of spectators is determined in compliance with EEA Guidance. ([EEA Guidance Page 7](#))
- **Media** – All social distancing and hygiene guidelines for spectators must be followed by media members planning to attend games. Media members should contact host school administrators prior to arriving at games to plan appropriate entry and available workspace.
- **Travel** – Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program (if not from the same household) are required to wear face coverings during travel to and from game locations. This is particularly important for carpool and bus situations.

COVID-19 Coach/Site Supervisor:

- Schools must designate a coach/site supervisor to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and supervising adherence to established COVID-19 protocols.
- All coaches, staff, officials, and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.

- All athletic directors/designee must follow established EEA guidelines for program and/or game management.
- Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Conduct training virtually and ensure that social distancing is maintained during training. (NFHS COVID-19 FREE Course)
- Coaches, athletes, officials, and spectators are required to cooperate with the local board of health whenever requested.

Practice and Game Protocols:

- Masks/Face Coverings – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including always covering both the nose and mouth. Gaiters are permissible, except in Rugby, if permitted by local/school policy. Face coverings comprised of multiple layers and a tighterweave are more effective and mandatory. Masks with valves or filters are notpermitted.

The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends
- Breathable
- Two or three layers

Less effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Loosely woven fabrics, such as loose knit fabrics
- Those that are difficult to breathe through (like plastic or leather)
- Single layer

Mask breaks may be taken for drinking, and when needed for breathing comfort. Mask breaks may only be taken when greater than 6 feet of distance can be maintained from all others.

All athletes, especially those that use mouthpieces, should prepare to have extra face coverings available. If mouthguards are removed on the sidelines or bench area, the athlete should use hand sanitizer each time after touching the mouthguard. Athletes are reminded that mouthguards must remain inserted in the mouth at all times for those sports that require mouthguards.

Athletes whose mask becomes damp should change regularly. Masks should be exchanged when damp or soiled. Caution should be exercised when replacing a mask if hands are soiled or dirty.

All individuals that are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or disability must provide a medical note to the school administrator/designee excusing the player from wearing a mask. This note must always be in the possession of the head coach and available to the opposing head coach and/or

game officials upon request. The head coach is the only participant that can submit documented permission of “non-mask” participation. Student-athletes cannot discuss or present non-mask permission to an official. It is recommended that athletic directors work to advise officials’ assignors in advance of a contest if their teams have non-mask participants.

It is the responsibility of the head coach to monitor and ensure that all players are wearing face coverings. Game administrators, home athletic director, or other designee may also assist in monitoring this.

Coaches and officials are also required to wear face coverings. Spectators, workers, and others are also required to wear face coverings and are expected to follow social distancing guidelines.

- Player habits – Coaches should work to break old habits and create new ones to minimize the spread of the virus. Spitting, nose clearing on the field, licking fingers, and spitting on gloves during practices and competitions is not permitted. The habit of minimizing any touching of the face and covering the cough should be practiced.

Given that indoor conditions and ventilation impact the playing of indoor sports, it is recommended that indoor participants and everyone in attendance work to refrain from active yelling due to the increased opportunity for droplet transmission. Coaches and game administrators are encouraged to monitor this and remind participants to eliminate any unnecessary shouting.

- It is required that teams delineate with a physical marker (cone, spray paint etc.) the social distancing requirements (6 ft.) for their players and coaches while on the sideline area.
- Interaction with Officials – Coaches must follow social distancing guidelines (6 feet) when interacting with an official or any other individual. Conversations can occur at a distance. Athletes should not approach a referee closer than 6 feet at any time.
- Hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes – Athletes, coaches, and officials are encouraged to provide their own hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) and/or sanitizing wipes and use them frequently – including prior to taking the field and upon return to the sideline. Additionally, it is emphasized to avoid touching the face throughout practice and competition.
- Ventilation should be optimized: [EEA Guidance Page 11](#)

- Pre-Game Introductions and Preparation – If pre-game meetings are necessary, they should be held with limited team representation – a single coach, single captain, etc. At the pregame meeting, all participants are required to wear face coverings and to socially distance from all participants

If a school chooses to do introductions, players will take their position on the field prior to being introduced. Introductions are suggested to be limited or eliminated to decrease time of athletes on the competition field.

The National Anthem may be played before competition. Appropriate social distancing must be maintained by teams and all personnel during the National Anthem. Singing the National Anthem indoors should not be permitted.

Indoor musical performances at interscholastic athletic events are not permitted.

- Ball Retrievers – Ball retrievers for any sport ARE NOT permitted. See sport specific modifications for extra ball placement procedures.
- Post-Game Procedures – Refer to Team Handshakes in this guidance.
- Recognition of the other team, coaches and/or officials should be done from a distance greater than 6 feet and should not delay departure from the competition venue. Teams and group of players should maintain social distancing (6 feet between individuals) and/or staggering departure times at the conclusion of the contest.

Equipment:

- General Equipment – There should be no shared athletic equipment unless required by the sport rules, i.e. – one basketball is used during competition and must be used by all players. Individual sport modifications should be followed for planned and periodic disinfecting. Any equipment that is used for practice should be cleaned and disinfected prior to and immediately following practice. Only one individual should handle the set-up and break-down of equipment on any given day (i.e., goals, cones, etc.).
- Balls - For moderate and high-risk sports - Each player should bring their own ball or use the same school-issued ball during practice. Skill training, conditioning, agility, etc. can be done with the one player/one ball concept. Balls must be sanitized before and after each practice/game. Sport specific modifications also list other ball cleaning practices during competition.

- Personal Items – Shoes, clothing, towels, and other personal items must not be shared among athletes. Any items that are not currently being worn/used should be stored inside a personal gym bag. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice/competition.

Hydration:

- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles cannot be shared. Student-athletes should bring enough water for the entire game.
- Bench water may be provided by the facility host, but the visiting team/participants should supply their own coolers unless agreed upon by the facility host. If used, water coolers shall be sanitized prior to use and frequently during the contest and disposable one-time-use cups shall be utilized.
- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should NOT be utilized. If water coolers or other large volume water container is utilized, it can only be accessed by a “designated” refill person with proper PPE. The squirting of water by anyone but the person drinking from their own water bottle is not permitted.
- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

Gym Bag – Supplies recommended for your personal gym bag:

- Reusable facial coverings/masks – The mask/face covering must be worn at all times. Sport specific modification may have further guidance for face coverings. All participants should have at least multiple back-up face covering.
- Warm-up clothing, electronic devices, and other personal items that are used by the athlete, prior to practice/competition, must be placed back in the gym bag before practice/competition begins.
- Athletes are recommended to always have a personal bottle of hand sanitizer available. There will be less chance of possible cross contamination and less time standing around waiting to use a shared hand sanitizer. Be sure to have this inside a sealable bag in case it leaks. This will be used when you enter and exit the practice/competition site, and at other necessary times in between.
- Athletes are recommended to have disinfectant wipes for personal use. When using a restroom area, it is best to disinfect any surface that may be touched, before and after using the facilities.
- Athletic braces, tape, inhalers, or any other sports-medical item used before, during or after practice/meets should be stored in a personal gym bag when not in use.

- Additional shoes should also be stored in a separate compartment or bag inside a gym bag to prevent possible cross contamination with other items in the gym bag.
- Any other item that is deemed necessary for practice or competition must be stored in the gym bag when it is not being used.

Girls Lacrosse Specific Modifications

In-Game Modifications:

The game of Girls Lacrosse will follow all NFHS Rules with the following modifications:

- Masks: Mandatory facial coverings per EEA regulations.
 - If a player is in violation of the mandatory mask rule, the referee will give the player a warning and the player is sent off the field. Continued infractions will follow the delay of game procedure (Rule 9-1-1c).
- Process Between Quarters
 - All games will be played in four equal quarters of 12.5 minutes with a 2- minute break between quarters 1 & 2 and 3 & 4. Halftime will be a maximum of 5 minutes determined during the pre-game meeting.
- Timeouts
 - Teams are responsible to run their timeout meetings following socially distanced protocols.
 - Players should sanitize during time outs.
- Player Interaction
 - Players should refrain from picking up another player by hand if a player has fallen to the ground. (Unless deemed necessary to help a player off the field due to injury).
 - Players will refrain from huddling on field as a team
 - Players will refrain from any hand touching (high fives, handshakes) during substitutions.
- The Draw
 - The official will make every attempt to expedite the draw.
 - Point of Emphasis: If a player moves after the draw has been set, a free position will be awarded to the opposing team at the center line.
 - The defending team should use their stick to carry the ball to the center after a goal is scored.
- 8-Meter Positioning
 - Only one player per hash on 8-meter setup, the existing rule that allows the defense to adjacent hashes remains in force.
 - Point of Emphasis: Players should not cluster during 8-meter free positions.

- Roster and Participation Limits
 - The use of swing players (i.e. Freshman/JV or JV/Varsity) is strongly discouraged and should only be utilized in situations to sustain a program.
 - Game Day Rosters will be limited to 45 players, including injured athletes and student-managers.
 - Each team may have no more than 6 adults in the bench area throughout the contest (coaches, volunteers, statisticians, videographers - are all included)
- Substitution Process and Sideline Protocol
 - All substitutes checking into the game must use hand sanitizer (if not wearing gloves) provided at the score table and check into the game “near” midfield but socially distant from others including game administrators.
 - Home team is responsible for creating a sub and penalty area on the field that allows social distancing.
 - Teams will substitute from their half of the field within the substitution area.
- Modifications/Points of Emphasis
 - Goalkeepers may not spit on their gloves. They can wet them with a water bottle. If the coach/official sees this happen, gloves will be taken out of play.
 - Players and officials may wear gloves and long undergarments.

Additional Modifications and Points of Emphasis for the Spring 2021 Season:

- Pre-Game Meeting
 - Limited to officials, single coach and single captain from each team.
 - Ensure the pre-game meeting is away from the sideline and both teams. Individuals need to maintain a social distance of 6 ft. during the meeting. Mask use by all participants is required.
 - Coaches will be responsible for verifying that all team members are properly equipped.
 - No handshakes prior to and following the Pre-Game Meeting or at the conclusion of the game.
 - The pre-game stick check procedure will be changed to random selection and closer inspection of eight sticks. Following the pre-game stick check, selected sticks must be sanitized prior to player usage.
- Post-Game Handshake
 - The postgame handshake is suspended. See MIAA Board of Directors recommendation.
 - Recognition of the other team, coaches and/or officials should be done from a distance greater than 6 ft. and should not delay departure from the competition venue.
 - Teams and groups of players should maintain social distancing (6 ft. between individuals) and/or staggering departure times at the conclusion of the contest.

Game Management:

- **Team Benches**
 - Consider seating fans opposite of team benches and separated from one another to promote social distancing.
 - If spectator seating is available behind team benches, it must be separated by at least 20 ft.
 - Each bench area must be set up at least 10 yards from midfield. Team benches (or chairs) must be set up to ensure social distancing between players, coaches, trainers, etc. on the sidelines. Teams may end up having players stretched out far down the sideline.
 - All non-uniformed team members who are not essential to game management shall be seated in the bleachers or general seating and socially distanced from other groups.

- **Game Officials**
 - Must wear a mask at all times per EEA Modifications.
 - Electronic whistles/artificial noisemakers are required.
 - Address broken/damaged masks when the play advantage has subsided (similar to how injuries are handled).
 - Must arrive at the facility dressed in uniform per EEA Modifications.
 - Must bring their own water bottles.
 - If a player steps in the direction of the referee with intent to complain/argue, that player will be given a yellow card. If the player comes within 6 ft. of an official to complain/argue, a red card will be issued.
 - Referees are instructed to exit the field and facility immediately upon the final whistle. They are not expected to sign the game sheet this year. It is the responsibility of the game administrator/coaches to make sure the information on the game sheet is correct.

- **Scorer's Table**
 - Personnel must be socially distanced and are required to wear masks. (Announcer, timer, shot clock, scorer, etc.)
 - Home team/host school provides hand sanitizer for each team at the scorer's table and disposable PPE.
 - Limit seats at the table to essential personnel which includes home team scorer and timer with a recommended distance of 6 ft. or greater between individuals. Statisticians or visiting scorer personnel are not essential.

- **Additional Considerations**
 - Adequate time should be provided between games to allow for social distancing of teams and spectators during entry/exit in multi-team and multi-game settings.
 - To the extent possible, it is recommended that schools play only one opponent per week (home/away).

Softball

Spring 2021

General Information

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When possible, students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower, clean clothing, and equipment at the end of every workout.

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- Playing Surface Access – Only essential personnel are permitted on the practice/competition field. These are defined as athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainers, and officials (competition). All others (i.e., managers, photographers, media, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field of play.

- Personal Items – It is recommended that each athlete bring their own gym bag for personal items (see gym bag information below). All personal items should remain in the gym bag when not in use. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice.
- Huddles – Social distancing (6 feet between individuals) must be maintained, and face coverings utilized at all times. Communicating with smaller groups is preferred. Huddles may not occur in locker rooms.
- Team Handshakes – Athletes shall NOT exchange handshakes before, during or following practices and competitions. Some MIAA sport specific modifications suggest sportsmanship recognition practices which replace handshakes.
- Spectators – Spectators must practice social distancing between different household units and accept personal responsibility for public health guidelines. The number of spectators is determined in compliance with EEA Guidance. ([EEA Guidance Page 7](#))
- Media – All social distancing and hygiene guidelines for spectators must be followed by media members planning to attend games. Media members should contact host school administrators prior to arriving at games to plan appropriate entry and available workspace.
- Travel – Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program (if not from the same household) are required to wear face coverings during travel to and from game locations. This is particularly important for carpool and bus situations.

COVID-19 Coach/Site Supervisor:

- Schools must designate a coach/site supervisor to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and supervising adherence to established COVID-19 protocols.
- All coaches, staff, officials, and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- All athletic directors/designee must follow established EEA guidelines for program and/or game management.
- Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Conduct training virtually and ensure that social distancing is maintained during training. (NFHS COVID-19 FREE Course)

- Coaches, athletes, officials, and spectators are required to cooperate with the local board of health whenever requested.

Practice and Game Protocols:

- Masks/Face Coverings – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including always covering both the nose and mouth. Gaiters are permissible, except in Rugby, if permitted by local/school policy. Face coverings comprised of multiple layers and a tighterweave are more effective and mandatory. Masks with valves or filters are notpermitted.

The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends
- Breathable
- Two or three layers

Less effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Loosely woven fabrics, such as loose knit fabrics
- Those that are difficult to breathe through (like plastic or leather)
- Single layer

Mask breaks may be taken for drinking, and when needed for breathing comfort. Mask breaks may only be taken when greater than 6 feet of distancecan be maintained from all others.

All athletes, especially those that use mouthpieces, should prepare to have extra face coverings available. If mouthguards are removed on the sidelines orbench area, the athlete should use hand sanitizer each time after touching the mouthguard. Athletes are reminded that mouthguards must remain inserted inthe mouth at all times for those sports that require mouthguards.

Athletes whose mask becomes damp should change regularly. Masks shouldbe exchanged when damp or soiled. Caution should be exercised when replacing a mask if hands are soiled or dirty.

All individuals that are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or disability must provide a medical note to the school administrator/designee excusing the player from wearing a mask. This note must always be in the possession of the head coach and available to the opposing head coach and/or game officials upon request. The head coach isthe only participant that can submit documented permission of “non-mask” participation. Student-athletes cannot discuss or present non-mask permission to an official. It is recommended that athletic directors work to advise officials’ assignors in advance of a contest if their teams have non-mask participants.

It is the responsibility of the head coach to monitor and ensure that all playersare wearing face coverings. Game administrators, home athletic director, or other

designee may also assist in monitoring this.

Coaches and officials are also required to wear face coverings. Spectators, workers, and others are also required to wear face coverings and are expected to follow social distancing guidelines.

- Player habits – Coaches should work to break old habits and create new ones to minimize the spread of the virus. Spitting, nose clearing on the field, licking fingers, and spitting on gloves during practices and competitions is not permitted. The habit of minimizing any touching of the face and covering the cough should be practiced.

Given that indoor conditions and ventilation impact the playing of indoor sports, it is recommended that indoor participants and everyone in attendance work to refrain from active yelling due to the increased opportunity for droplet transmission. Coaches and game administrators are encouraged to monitor this and remind participants to eliminate any unnecessary shouting.

- It is required that teams delineate with a physical marker (cone, spray paint etc.) the social distancing requirements (6 ft.) for their players and coaches while on the sideline area.
- Interaction with Officials – Coaches must follow social distancing guidelines (6 feet) when interacting with an official or any other individual. Conversations can occur at a distance. Athletes should not approach a referee closer than 6 feet at any time.
- Hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes – Athletes, coaches, and officials are encouraged to provide their own hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) and/or sanitizing wipes and use them frequently – including prior to taking the field and upon return to the sideline. Additionally, it is emphasized to avoid touching the face throughout practice and competition.
- Ventilation should be optimized: [EEA Guidance Page 11](#)
- Pre-Game Introductions and Preparation – If pre-game meetings are necessary, they should be held with limited team representation – a single coach, single captain, etc. At the pregame meeting, all participants are required to wear face coverings and to socially distance from all participants

If a school chooses to do introductions, players will take their position on the field prior to being introduced. Introductions are suggested to be limited or

eliminated to decrease time of athletes on the competition field.

The National Anthem may be played before competition. Appropriate social distancing must be maintained by teams and all personnel during the National Anthem. Singing the National Anthem indoors should not be permitted.

Indoor musical performances at interscholastic athletic events are not permitted.

- Ball Retrievers – Ball retrievers for any sport ARE NOT permitted. See sport specific modifications for extra ball placement procedures.
- Post-Game Procedures – Refer to Team Handshakes in this guidance. Recognition of the other team, coaches and/or officials should be done from a distance greater than 6 feet and should not delay departure from the competition venue. Teams and group of players should maintain social distancing (6 feet between individuals) and/or staggering departure times at the conclusion of the contest.

Equipment:

- General Equipment – There should be no shared athletic equipment unless required by the sport rules, i.e. – one basketball is used during competition and must be used by all players. Individual sport modifications should be followed for planned and periodic disinfecting. Any equipment that is used for practice should be cleaned and disinfected prior to and immediately following practice. Only one individual should handle the set-up and break-down of equipment on any given day (i.e., goals, cones, etc.).
- Balls - For moderate and high-risk sports - Each player should bring their own ball or use the same school-issued ball during practice. Skill training, conditioning, agility, etc. can be done with the one player/one ball concept. Balls must be sanitized before and after each practice/game. Sport specific modifications also list other ball cleaning practices during competition.
- Personal Items – Shoes, clothing, towels, and other personal items must not be shared among athletes. Any items that are not currently being worn/used should be stored inside a personal gym bag. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice/competition.

Hydration:

- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles cannot be shared. Student-athletes should bring enough water for the entire game.
- Bench water may be provided by the facility host, but the visiting

team/participants should supply their own coolers unless agreed upon by the facility host. If used, water coolers shall be sanitized prior to use and frequently during the contest and disposable one-time-use cups shall be utilized.

- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should NOT be utilized. If water coolers or other large volume water container is utilized, it can only be accessed by a “designated” refill person with proper PPE. The squirting of water by anyone but the person drinking from their own water bottle is not permitted.
- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

Gym Bag – Supplies recommended for your personal gym bag:

- Reusable facial coverings/masks – The mask/face covering must be worn at all times. Sport specific modification may have further guidance for face coverings. All participants should have at least multiple back-up face covering.
- Warm-up clothing, electronic devices, and other personal items that are used by the athlete, prior to practice/competition, must be placed back in the gym bag before practice/competition begins.
- Athletes are recommended to always have a personal bottle of hand sanitizer available. There will be less chance of possible cross contamination and less time standing around waiting to use a shared hand sanitizer. Be sure to have this inside a sealable bag in case it leaks. This will be used when you enter and exit the practice/competition site, and at other necessary times in between.
- Athletes are recommended to have disinfectant wipes for personal use. When using a restroom area, it is best to disinfect any surface that may be touched, before and after using the facilities.
- Athletic braces, tape, inhalers, or any other sports-medical item used before, during or after practice/meets should be stored in a personal gym bag when not in use.
- Additional shoes should also be stored in a separate compartment or bag inside a gym bag to prevent possible cross contamination with other items in the gym bag.
- Any other item that is deemed necessary for practice or competition must be stored in the gym bag when it is not being used.

Softball Specific Modifications

General Game Requirements:

- Face Masks are required at all times; Gaiters are permissible but must be multi-ply

- Before, during and after the contest, players, coaches, game officials, team personnel and game administration officials must wash and sanitize their hands as often as possible
- At conclusion of contests, coaches and players will manage social distancing while departing benches
- Spectator attendance will follow EEA guidelines with consideration for venue, school, and league policies.

Team Benches and Personnel:

- Everyone must have their own beverage container that is not shared; Container must be labeled for each participant
- Non-essential personnel in the dugout, field and near participants throughout the contest must be limited.
- Limit bench personnel to allow for social distancing of 6 ft. or greater, teams must develop additional area(s) beyond the provided team bench for players to spread out for water breaks, social distancing, and other needs. Team benches must expand to areas on the sidelines that allow players to use additional seating allocated for players and coaches (only) to adhere to the 6 ft. spacing guidelines.
- Disinfect equipment and uniform after use.
- Softball equipment bags must adhere to specified protocols listed under Personal Items and Gym Bag protocols.

Locker Rooms:

- Adhere to established EEA guidelines for locker rooms [EEA document page 8](#).

Game Officials:

- Must wear a mask at all times per [EEA document page 5](#).
- Must plan to arrive at the facility dressed in uniform per [EEA document page 9](#).
- Do not share uniforms, towels, apparel, and equipment
- Must bring their own water bottles
- Plate Umpire
 - The plate umpire must minimize the time in close proximity to the catcher, “stepping in” as late as possible
 - The plate umpire should work to allow safe distance from the catcher while maintaining positioning to officiate the contest
 - The plate umpire must use optimal mask fitting while in the position behind the catcher

Game Modifications and Management:

- Limitations on total players - 20 players per team total. Field design respective of social distancing may dictate total players that may participate in a contest.
- No seeds, gum or spitting is allowed during the 2020-2021 Spring Season
- No licking of fingers or spitting on hands
- The umpire will issue a warning (1st offense) to a player if they intentionally

remove their mask

- 2nd offense the coach will be warned about the player removing their mask
- 3rd offense the player will be removed from the game.
- Captains and coaches must maintain social distancing of 6 ft. when talking or conferring with a game umpire.
- Game umpires will maintain social distancing of 6 ft. during the pre-game meeting with 1 captain from each team and head coaches.
- Social distancing must be maintained at all times; this includes but is not limited to:
 - While in the dugout
 - During timeouts/coach talking to pitcher and other players on the field
- Home team MUST supply both teams with 3 game balls, which the pitchers will keep during the entire game.
 - Home team must have more balls available in case of loss balls/damaged balls
- Players must bring and use their own equipment (gloves, bats, helmets, etc.)
 - If a player is unable to bring their own equipment and must share with another teammate, the equipment must be sprayed with a sanitizer before and after each use.
- Suspend pregame protocol of shaking hands during introductions/pregame meeting.
- Suspend postgame protocol of shaking hands
- Concessions are not allowed for softball games
- Media location is to be determined by the host school; all media members must wear a mask at all times, and follow all social distancing guidelines for spectators. Advance notification to host school administration is required.

Lacrosse - Boys

Spring 2021

General Information

Every school district/program should consult with their local health department to determine which risk level to start this program safely. Continued consultation with the local health department should be used to determine when progression to the next risk level can be initiated.

Playing sports come with inherent risks (twisted ankles to concussions). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional risks to group activities/sports. The MIAA has developed these modifications to lower risks from COVID-19 using National and State guidelines and input from medical specialists. Playing any sport (even with modified play) will continue to carry some risk of acquiring COVID-19 but these modifications were developed to help guide schools in best practices to limit exposure while offering an opportunity for interscholastic athletics for those sports approved for EEA Level 3 participation. The Mass Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) categorizes sports as: “Lower Risk”, “Moderate Risk”, “Higher Risk”. These categories are based on how the sport is traditionally played. Additional information can be found on their website: [EEA Youth and Amateur Sports Resources](#)

This document is to be utilized in compliance with all EEA, DESE and DPH guidelines in place.

Learn more about participation in athletics during the pandemic by taking the free NFHS online course: [“COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators](#)

Mitigation of COVID-19 Spread:

It is important to note that COVID-19 infection related to youth sports seems to spread from outside the field play. Coaches are encouraged to remind athletes about mitigation strategies including distancing and mask wearing. Athletes are encouraged to support the active cooperation of all students within the school community by adhering to social distancing and mask wearing in all settings.

Pre-Workout/Pre-Contest Screening:

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program may not attend practices or games if they are isolated for illness or quarantined for exposure to infection.

Prior to attending practices or games, athletes and coaches should check their temperature. If a student-athlete or a coaching staff member has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or above, they should not attend practices or games. Likewise if they have

any other symptoms of COVID-19 infection (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), they should not attend practices or games. Student-athletes and coaches who have symptoms of COVID-19 infection should test and isolate in accordance with DPH guidance.

For students with symptoms who test negative for COVID-19 infection, they may return to sport once they are approved to return to school (when afebrile for 24 hours and symptomatically improved).

Student-athletes and coaches who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should refrain from exercise for ten days from symptom onset. Procedures for return to activity/play should follow CDC, DPH, and local board of health guidelines (CDC link above). In addition, persons with COVID-19 infection need to receive written clearance from their health care provider and school administrator/designee to return to sport. Return to activity should be slow and graded.

The links below are examples of Graduated Return to Play protocols. These examples are not required protocols mandated by the MIAA, rather resources for information.

[British Journal of Sports Medicine Infographic](#)
[MA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program who were exposed to COVID-19 must quarantine, including no participation in practices or games following exposure, and should follow all CDC, DPH, and local board of health protocols. Athletes and coaches should receive written clearance from their school administrator/designee to return to sport.

Should a player be quarantined because of a COVID-19 designation, he/she must participate in a minimum of one practice before returning to interscholastic competition. Should a player being quarantined because of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 the ATC/Athletic Director should consider a more extensive return-to-play protocol for the individual player(s). It is necessary for all athletes to complete all other state guidelines.

COVID-19 Testing:

Recent developments in COVID-19 testing have become more prevalent within the Commonwealth. For Higher Risk sports, the use of COVID-19 testing may help to support the continued participation throughout the entire season of play.

Cohorts and/or Participants:

A record should be kept of all individuals present at team activities i.e. – practices, practice cohorts, competitions, etc.

Weather Resources:

Extreme caution should be exercised when making decisions to participate in athletics

when temperatures may present challenges to athletes' health and safety. The following links will help to offer information in planning for safe practice and play during extreme temperature conditions.

- [MIAA Heat Modification Policy](#)
- [MIAA SMC Cold Weather Reference Document](#)
- [NATA: Environmental Cold Injuries](#)
- [NFHS: Participating in Cold Weather – Minimizing the Risk](#)
- [NFHS: Guidelines for Competition in the Cold](#)

Social Distancing:

- Practice – Coaches are responsible for ensuring social distancing is maintained between players as much as possible. This includes additional spacing between athletes while stretching, warming up, chatting, changing drills, etc. Athletes must maintain spacing, and there should be no congregating of athletes while running drills. Workouts, when possible could be conducted in 'pods' of athletes, with the same 5-10 athletes always working out together. Ideally athletes should not move between pods for the entire season. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection. Records should be kept of who is in each group, each day.
- Locker Rooms – Locker rooms and changing areas must follow current EEA Guidance ([EEA Guidance Page 8](#)), except for toilet facilities. Facility Operators should ensure that users can abide by capacity restrictions and social distancing standards and establish signage and visual guidelines. Signage should remind users to limit time spent in enclosed area. If locker rooms are utilized, staggered use based on time and distance is recommended.

When possible, students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower, clean clothing, and equipment at the end of every workout.

- Benches – No benches should be used during practice. Players' items should be separated as below for personal items, at least 6 feet apart. Benches should be permitted only during games with six feet of distancing required between participants. ([EEA Guidance Page 9](#))
- Playing Surface Access – Only essential personnel are permitted on the practice/competition field. These are defined as athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainers, and officials (competition). All others (i.e., managers, photographers, media, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field of play.
- Personal Items – It is recommended that each athlete bring their own gym

bag for personal items (see gym bag information below). All personal items should remain in the gym bag when not in use. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice.

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- Team Handshakes – Athletes shall NOT exchange handshakes before, during or following practices and competitions. Some MIAA sport specific modifications suggest sportsmanship recognition practices which replace handshakes.
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- All coaches, staff, officials, and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- All athletic directors/designee must follow established EEA guidelines for program and/or game management.
- Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Conduct training virtually and ensure that social distancing is maintained during training. (NFHS COVID-19 FREE Course)
- Coaches, athletes, officials, and spectators are required to cooperate with the

local board of health whenever requested.

Practice and Game Protocols:

- Masks/Face Coverings – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including always covering both the nose and mouth. Gaiters are permissible, except in Rugby, if permitted by local/school policy. Face coverings comprised of multiple layers and a tighterweave are more effective and mandatory. Masks with valves or filters are notpermitted.

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Hydration:

- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles cannot be shared. Student-athletes should bring enough water for the entire game.
- Bench water may be provided by the facility host, but the visiting team/participants should supply their own coolers unless agreed upon by the facility host. If used, water coolers shall be sanitized prior to use and frequently

during the contest and disposable one-time-use cups shall be utilized.

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- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

Gym Bag – Supplies recommended for your personal gym bag:

- Reusable facial coverings/masks – The mask/face covering must be worn at all times. Sport specific modification may have further guidance for face coverings. All participants should have at least multiple back-up face covering.
- Warm-up clothing, electronic devices, and other personal items that are used by the athlete, prior to practice/competition, must be placed back in the gym bag before practice/competition begins.
- Athletes are recommended to always have a personal bottle of hand sanitizer available. There will be less chance of possible cross contamination and less time standing around waiting to use a shared hand sanitizer. Be sure to have this inside a sealable bag in case it leaks. This will be used when you enter and exit the practice/competition site, and at other necessary times in between.
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- Any other item that is deemed necessary for practice or competition must be stored in the gym bag when it is not being used.

Boys Lacrosse Specific Modifications

NFHS Lacrosse Rules Modifications:

1. The Field (1-2-7): The Scorer’s Table

The substitution box/scorer’s table areas shall be set up with 3 separate tables/seats maintaining 6 foot physical distancing. These spaces will be designated for one timekeeper and one scorebook designee per team

2. The Field (1-2-8): Players' and Coaches' box

The sideline - players' and coaches' box - shall be extended to the end line to ensure proper social distancing.

3. Player Equipment (1-9-2): Optional Equipment, Face Shields and Masks

Clear, molded, and non-rigid face shields approved by the helmet manufacturer are allowed. *Masks will be required.*

4. Players, Coaches, and Other Game Personnel:

Coaches and officials should maintain physical distance whenever possible during a game including stick checks, official's meetings, etc. All adult members will work together to ensure consistency of distancing protocols.

5. Time of the Game (3-1-1): Time Reduction

Game will remain with four 12-minute quarters with halftime reduced to 5 minutes with teams remaining on the field. Time between quarters will be a maximum of 2 minutes. Additional considerations for modifications of time should refer to heat policy as needed.

6. Facing Off (4-3-1, 2, and 3): Starting Play with Facing Off

For the spring 2021 MIAA Lacrosse season, the NCAA rules for the Faceoff will be adopted. Officials will continue to utilize current procedural practices for expediting safe face-offs.

7. Penalty Enforcement (7-1-1): Procedure

In instances of violation, officials should use the electronic whistle quickly and award the ball. This "quick" whistle will apply in loose ball technical foul situations and play on situations where possession is not clearly imminent.

8. Roster Size:

Game Day Rosters will be limited to 45 players, including injured athletes and student-managers.

Each team may have no more than 6 adults in the bench area throughout the contest (coaches, volunteers, statisticians, videographers - are all included)

Additional Considerations/Points of Emphasis: Pregame

- All participants, officials, coaches, and administrative personnel must wear face coverings at all times.
- No equipment inspections prior to the game – *Note: Goalkeeper's chest protectors must meet new NOCSAE guidelines.*
- One (1) Coach per team will meet with officials for pregame certification.
- No pregame line up. Coaches will relay information from officials meeting to their teams.
- No meeting with faceoff players.
- Meeting with Captains: One (1) captain per team, will meet with the official for the coin toss, maintaining social distancing of 6 ft. The official will show coin result to each captain.
- Team bench areas should be clearly marked to remind players of proper social distancing of 6 ft.

In-Game-Play: Mask wearing

- Emphasis on mask wearing during game play - mask is considered a uniform/piece of equipment
- Coaches/Players/Teams will manage/assist with enforcement
- Officials primarily in dead ball situations will enforce face coverings by sending the player off the field for sub. Repeated instances for an individual player will require additional conversation /enforcement with coaches.

Postgame:

- No handshakes.
- Teams will stay in their team areas, no running onto the field. Players will exit field to their team bench/sideline.
- End of game: in place of handshake line, teams can lineup extending from their respective side of the substitution box facing the opposing team's line and raise sticks in a salute of sportsmanship.

Baseball

Spring 2021

General Information

Every school district/program should consult with their local health department to determine which risk level to start this program safely. Continued consultation with the local health department should be used to determine when progression to the next risk level can be initiated.

Playing sports come with inherent risks (twisted ankles to concussions). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional risks to group activities/sports. The MIAA has developed these modifications to lower risks from COVID-19 using National and State guidelines and input from medical specialists. Playing any sport (even with modified play) will continue to carry some risk of acquiring COVID-19 but these modifications were developed to help guide schools in best practices to limit exposure while offering an opportunity for interscholastic athletics for those sports approved for EEA Level 3 participation. The Mass Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) categorizes sports as: “Lower Risk”, “Moderate Risk”, “Higher Risk”. These categories are based on how the sport is traditionally played. Additional information can be found on their website: [EEA Youth and Amateur Sports Resources](#)

This document is to be utilized in compliance with all EEA, DESE and DPH guidelines in place.

Learn more about participation in athletics during the pandemic by taking the free NFHS online course: [“COVID-19 for Coaches and Administrators](#)

Mitigation of COVID-19 Spread:

It is important to note that COVID-19 infection related to youth sports seems to spread from outside the field play. Coaches are encouraged to remind athletes about mitigation strategies including distancing and mask wearing. Athletes are encouraged to support the active cooperation of all students within the school community by adhering to social distancing and mask wearing in all settings.

Pre-Workout/Pre-Contest Screening:

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program may not attend practices or games if they are isolated for illness or quarantined for exposure to infection.

Prior to attending practices or games, athletes and coaches should check their temperature. If a student-athlete or a coaching staff member has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or above, they should not attend practices or games. Likewise if they have

any other symptoms of COVID-19 infection (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), they should not attend practices or games. Student-athletes and coaches who have symptoms of COVID-19 infection should test and isolate in accordance with DPH guidance.

For students with symptoms who test negative for COVID-19 infection, they may return to sport once they are approved to return to school (when afebrile for 24 hours and symptomatically improved).

Student-athletes and coaches who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection should refrain from exercise for ten days from symptom onset. Procedures for return to activity/play should follow CDC, DPH, and local board of health guidelines (CDC link above). In addition, persons with COVID-19 infection need to receive written clearance from their health care provider and school administrator/designee to return to sport. Return to activity should be slow and graded.

The links below are examples of Graduated Return to Play protocols. These examples are not required protocols mandated by the MIAA, rather resources for information.

[British Journal of Sports Medicine Infographic](#)
[MA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program who were exposed to COVID-19 must quarantine, including no participation in practices or games following exposure, and should follow all CDC, DPH, and local board of health protocols. Athletes and coaches should receive written clearance from their school administrator/designee to return to sport.

Should a player be quarantined because of a COVID-19 designation, he/she must participate in a minimum of one practice before returning to interscholastic competition. Should a player being quarantined because of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 the ATC/Athletic Director should consider a more extensive return-to-play protocol for the individual player(s). It is necessary for all athletes to complete all other state guidelines.

COVID-19 Testing:

Recent developments in COVID-19 testing have become more prevalent within the Commonwealth. For Higher Risk sports, the use of COVID-19 testing may help to support the continued participation throughout the entire season of play.

Cohorts and/or Participants:

A record should be kept of all individuals present at team activities i.e. – practices, practice cohorts, competitions, etc.

Weather Resources:

Extreme caution should be exercised when making decisions to participate in athletics

when temperatures may present challenges to athletes' health and safety. The following links will help to offer information in planning for safe practice and play during extreme temperature conditions.

- [MIAA Heat Modification Policy](#)
- [MIAA SMC Cold Weather Reference Document](#)
- [NATA: Environmental Cold Injuries](#)
- [NFHS: Participating in Cold Weather – Minimizing the Risk](#)
- [NFHS: Guidelines for Competition in the Cold](#)

Social Distancing:

- Practice – Coaches are responsible for ensuring social distancing is maintained between players as much as possible. This includes additional spacing between athletes while stretching, warming up, chatting, changing drills, etc. Athletes must maintain spacing, and there should be no congregating of athletes while running drills. Workouts, when possible could be conducted in 'pods' of athletes, with the same 5-10 athletes always working out together. Ideally athletes should not move between pods for the entire season. This ensures more limited exposure if someone develops an infection. Records should be kept of who is in each group, each day.
- Locker Rooms –Locker rooms and changing areas must follow current EEA Guidance ([EEA Guidance Page 8](#)), except for toilet facilities. Facility Operators should ensure that users can abide by capacity restrictions and social distancing standards and establish signage and visual guidelines. Signage should remind users to limit time spent in enclosed area. If locker rooms are utilized, staggered use based on time and distance is recommended.

When possible, students should report to workouts in proper gear and immediately return home to shower, clean clothing, and equipment at the end of every workout.

- Benches – No benches should be used during practice. Players' items should be separated as below for personal items, at least 6 feet apart. Benches should be permitted only during games with six feet of distancing required between participants. ([EEA Guidance Page 9](#))
- Playing Surface Access – Only essential personnel are permitted on the practice/competition field. These are defined as athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainers, and officials (competition). All others (i.e., managers, photographers, media, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field of play.

- Personal Items – It is recommended that each athlete bring their own gym bag for personal items (see gym bag information below). All personal items should remain in the gym bag when not in use. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice.
- Huddles – Social distancing (6 feet between individuals) must be maintained, and face coverings utilized at all times. Communicating with smaller groups is preferred. Huddles may not occur in locker rooms.
- Team Handshakes – Athletes shall NOT exchange handshakes before, during or following practices and competitions. Some MIAA sport specific modifications suggest sportsmanship recognition practices which replace handshakes.
- Spectators – Spectators must practice social distancing between different household units and accept personal responsibility for public health guidelines. The number of spectators is determined in compliance with EEA Guidance. ([EEA Guidance Page 7](#))
- Media – All social distancing and hygiene guidelines for spectators must be followed by media members planning to attend games. Media members should contact host school administrators prior to arriving at games to plan appropriate entry and available workspace.
- Travel – Student-athletes, coaches, spectators, and any others associated with the athletic program (if not from the same household) are required to wear face coverings during travel to and from game locations. This is particularly important for carpool and bus situations.

COVID-19 Coach/Site Supervisor:

- Schools must designate a coach/site supervisor to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and supervising adherence to established COVID-19 protocols.
- All coaches, staff, officials, and families should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- All athletic directors/designee must follow established EEA guidelines for program and/or game management.
- Train coaches, officials, and staff on all safety protocols. Conduct training virtually and ensure that social distancing is maintained during training. (NFHS COVID-19 FREE Course)

- Coaches, athletes, officials, and spectators are required to cooperate with the local board of health whenever requested.

Practice and Game Protocols:

- Masks/Face Coverings – Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines, including always covering both the nose and mouth. Gaiters are permissible, except in Rugby, if permitted by local/school policy. Face coverings comprised of multiple layers and a tighterweave are more effective and mandatory. Masks with valves or filters are notpermitted.

The most effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends
- Breathable
- Two or three layers

Less effective fabrics for cloth masks are:

- Loosely woven fabrics, such as loose knit fabrics
- Those that are difficult to breathe through (like plastic or leather)
- Single layer

Mask breaks may be taken for drinking, and when needed for breathing comfort. Mask breaks may only be taken when greater than 6 feet of distancecan be maintained from all others.

All athletes, especially those that use mouthpieces, should prepare to have extra face coverings available. If mouthguards are removed on the sidelines orbench area, the athlete should use hand sanitizer each time after touching the mouthguard. Athletes are reminded that mouthguards must remain inserted inthe mouth at all times for those sports that require mouthguards.

Athletes whose mask becomes damp should change regularly. Masks shouldbe exchanged when damp or soiled. Caution should be exercised when replacing a mask if hands are soiled or dirty.

All individuals that are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or disability must provide a medical note to the school administrator/designee excusing the player from wearing a mask. This note must always be in the possession of the head coach and available to the opposing head coach and/or game officials upon request. The head coach isthe only participant that can submit documented permission of “non-mask” participation. Student-athletes cannot discuss or present non-mask permission to an official. It is recommended that athletic directors work to advise officials’ assignors in advance of a contest if their teams have non-mask participants.

It is the responsibility of the head coach to monitor and ensure that all playersare wearing face coverings. Game administrators, home athletic director, or other

designee may also assist in monitoring this.

Coaches and officials are also required to wear face coverings. Spectators, workers, and others are also required to wear face coverings and are expected to follow social distancing guidelines.

- Player habits – Coaches should work to break old habits and create new ones to minimize the spread of the virus. Spitting, nose clearing on the field, licking fingers, and spitting on gloves during practices and competitions is not permitted. The habit of minimizing any touching of the face and covering the cough should be practiced.

Given that indoor conditions and ventilation impact the playing of indoor sports, it is recommended that indoor participants and everyone in attendance work to refrain from active yelling due to the increased opportunity for droplet transmission. Coaches and game administrators are encouraged to monitor this and remind participants to eliminate any unnecessary shouting.

- It is required that teams delineate with a physical marker (cone, spray paint etc.) the social distancing requirements (6 ft.) for their players and coaches while on the sideline area.
- Interaction with Officials – Coaches must follow social distancing guidelines (6 feet) when interacting with an official or any other individual. Conversations can occur at a distance. Athletes should not approach a referee closer than 6 feet at any time.
- Hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes – Athletes, coaches, and officials are encouraged to provide their own hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) and/or sanitizing wipes and use them frequently – including prior to taking the field and upon return to the sideline. Additionally, it is emphasized to avoid touching the face throughout practice and competition.
- Ventilation should be optimized: [EEA Guidance Page 11](#)
- Pre-Game Introductions and Preparation – If pre-game meetings are necessary, they should be held with limited team representation – a single coach, single captain, etc. At the pregame meeting, all participants are required to wear face coverings and to socially distance from all participants

If a school chooses to do introductions, players will take their position on the field prior to being introduced. Introductions are suggested to be limited or

eliminated to decrease time of athletes on the competition field.

The National Anthem may be played before competition. Appropriate social distancing must be maintained by teams and all personnel during the National Anthem. Singing the National Anthem indoors should not be permitted.

Indoor musical performances at interscholastic athletic events are not permitted.

- Ball Retrievers – Ball retrievers for any sport ARE NOT permitted. See sport specific modifications for extra ball placement procedures.
- Post-Game Procedures – Refer to Team Handshakes in this guidance. Recognition of the other team, coaches and/or officials should be done from a distance greater than 6 feet and should not delay departure from the competition venue. Teams and group of players should maintain social distancing (6 feet between individuals) and/or staggering departure times at the conclusion of the contest.

Equipment:

- General Equipment – There should be no shared athletic equipment unless required by the sport rules, i.e. – one basketball is used during competition and must be used by all players. Individual sport modifications should be followed for planned and periodic disinfecting. Any equipment that is used for practice should be cleaned and disinfected prior to and immediately following practice. Only one individual should handle the set-up and break-down of equipment on any given day (i.e., goals, cones, etc.).
- Balls - For moderate and high-risk sports - Each player should bring their own ball or use the same school-issued ball during practice. Skill training, conditioning, agility, etc. can be done with the one player/one ball concept. Balls must be sanitized before and after each practice/game. Sport specific modifications also list other ball cleaning practices during competition.
- Personal Items – Shoes, clothing, towels, and other personal items must not be shared among athletes. Any items that are not currently being worn/used should be stored inside a personal gym bag. Gym bags should be placed in a predetermined area 6 feet apart for the duration of practice/competition.

Hydration:

- All students must bring their own water bottle. Water bottles cannot be shared. Student-athletes should bring enough water for the entire game.
- Bench water may be provided by the facility host, but the visiting

team/participants should supply their own coolers unless agreed upon by the facility host. If used, water coolers shall be sanitized prior to use and frequently during the contest and disposable one-time-use cups shall be utilized.

- Hydration stations (water cows, water trough, water fountains, etc.) should NOT be utilized. If water coolers or other large volume water container is utilized, it can only be accessed by a “designated” refill person with proper PPE. The squirting of water by anyone but the person drinking from their own water bottle is not permitted.
- Water fountains are to be used as refill stations ONLY.

Gym Bag – Supplies recommended for your personal gym bag:

- Reusable facial coverings/masks – The mask/face covering must be worn at all times. Sport specific modification may have further guidance for face coverings. All participants should have at least multiple back-up face covering.
- Warm-up clothing, electronic devices, and other personal items that are used by the athlete, prior to practice/competition, must be placed back in the gym bag before practice/competition begins.
- Athletes are recommended to always have a personal bottle of hand sanitizer available. There will be less chance of possible cross contamination and less time standing around waiting to use a shared hand sanitizer. Be sure to have this inside a sealable bag in case it leaks. This will be used when you enter and exit the practice/competition site, and at other necessary times in between.
- Athletes are recommended to have disinfectant wipes for personal use. When using a restroom area, it is best to disinfect any surface that may be touched, before and after using the facilities.
- Athletic braces, tape, inhalers, or any other sports-medical item used before, during or after practice/meets should be stored in a personal gym bag when not in use.
- Additional shoes should also be stored in a separate compartment or bag inside a gym bag to prevent possible cross contamination with other items in the gym bag.
- Any other item that is deemed necessary for practice or competition must be stored in the gym bag when it is not being used.

Baseball Specific Modifications

Pre-Game Protocol:

- Pre-Game Meeting:

- Limited to one umpire and one coach from each team.
- No handshakes prior to and following the Pre-Game Meeting.
- Starting Lineups/National Anthem:
 - Starting lineups are announced only – Players and coaches must refrain from high fives, handshake lines, and other physical contact with teammates, opposing players, coaches, officials, and fans.
 - Appropriate social distancing maintained by teams during the National Anthem.
- Team Benches, Dugouts and Personnel
 - Before, during and after the contest, players, coaches, umpires, team personnel and game administration officials should wash and sanitize their hands as often as possible.
 - It is the responsibility of the host school to provide disinfectant and disinfecting wipes for each team.
 - Only essential personnel are permitted on the field (i.e. - athletes, coaches, medical personnel/athletic trainer and umpires).
 - All others (managers, photographers, media, spectators, etc.) are considered non-essential personnel and are not to be on the field.
 - Team benches must be redefined and expanded to areas on the sidelines that allow for additional space so players and coaches can adhere to the 6ft. spacing guidelines.

Game Modifications:

- Masks: Athletes are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks per EEA guidelines.
 - The host school is required to setup designated areas for students from each team to take mask breaks when coming off the field.
- Roster and Participation Limits
 - Game Day Roster Limit – a maximum of 20 players per team will be allowed to be in uniform.
 - No more than 4 coaches will be allowed on the bench at any time.
 - The use of swing players (i.e. Freshman/JV or JV/Varsity) is strongly discouraged and should only be utilized in situations to sustain a program.
- Player Interaction:
 - Players must refrain from huddling on field as a team prior to, during or following the contest.
 - Players must refrain from huddling on the mound during a pitcher's conference. Conferences should be limited to a coach, a catcher and a pitcher only. If fielders are needed, they must maintain 6' distancing.
 - Players must refrain from any hand touching (high fives, handshakes) before, during or after the contest.
 - The postgame handshake is suspended. See MIAA Board of Directors recommendation.

- No seeds, gum or spitting is permitted.
- Players must refrain from licking fingers or spitting on hands.

Umpires:

- Umpires must wear a mask at all times.
- Plate Umpire
 - The plate umpire must minimize the time in close proximity to the catcher, “stepping in” as late as possible
 - The plate umpire should work to allow safe distance from the catcher while maintaining positioning to officiate the contest
 - The plate umpire must use optimal mask fitting while in position behind the catcher
- If a player is in violation of the mandatory mask rule, the umpire has the authority to pause play. The following warning structure will be used:
 - 1st offense, the umpire will issue a warning to a player if they intentionally remove their mask
 - 2nd offense, the umpire will issue a warning to the coach about the player removing their mask
 - 3rd offense, the umpire will remove the player from the game.
- Umpires must address broken/damaged masks when the play has subsided (similar to how injuries are handled).
- Umpires must arrive to the facility dressed in uniform per [EEA document page9](#).
- Umpires must bring their own water bottles.

Equipment:

- Players must bring and use their own equipment when possible.
- Equipment (i.e. bats, helmets, catcher’s gear, etc.) can be shared but must be properly sanitized after each use.
- The home team is required to provide game balls.

Game Management:

- Spectators: Reference spectator limitations per [EEA Document page 7](#).
 - The home team administrator will keep spectator attendance records.
- Locker Rooms: The use of locker rooms must adhere to [EEA Document page 8](#).
- Media: Location determined by host school, must wear mask and follow all social distancing guidelines for spectators. Advance notification to host school administration is required.
- Post-Game: Adequate time should be provided between games to allow for social distancing of teams and spectators during entry/exit in multi-team and multi-game settings.