

**JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY UNION #55**

August 26, 2021 – 6:30 p.m.

MEETING HELD REMOTELY THROUGH ZOOM

Mattapoisett, MA 02739

District Members Present: Heather Burke, Acting Chairperson, Christine Marcolini, James Muse, Margaret McSweeney, Frances Kearns, Suzanne Tseki, Matthew Monteiro, Joe Pires, and Kate Duggan.

District Members Absent:

Union Members Present: Sharon Hartley, Acting Chairperson, Anne Fernandes, Nichole Daniel, Sharon Hartley, April Rios, Robin Rounseville, Mary Beauregard, Tiffini Reedy and Carly Lavin,

Union Members Absent:

Other Staff Members Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Diana Russo, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, administrative team, staff members, parents, community members and members of the press.

Meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Acting Chairperson Burke of the ORR School Committee and Acting Chairperson Hartley of the Massachusetts School Superintendency Union #55.

Acting Chairperson Hartley made the following statement:

“Welcome to the Joint School Committee thank you for joining us, I’m sure everyone has been paying close attention to what’s been happening on the news regarding education and we want to clarify the procedure and the actions that we will take tonight. We want to be sure that everyone understands that in light of the state’s mask mandate there will be no vote taken by the school committee tonight or whether or not to wear masks in school, because we have a mandate from the state and it is in place.”

Acting Chairperson Burke made the following statement:

“From a procedural standpoint Ms. Hartley and I have agreed that we will move open comments to the end of the meeting after we have gone through the other items on the agenda.”

Mr. Nelson confirmed that per school committee policy the chairperson has the right to move open comments to the end of the meeting.

CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT:

Acting Chairperson Hartley just wanted to express appreciation to staff and administration and all of those involved in our schools and who have worked so hard over the summer to prepare for this exciting new school year. She expressed she’s particularly grateful to the Superintendent and the Administrators who worked to create a back to school plan, she expressed she was able to view it on the Rochester School website and she was really impressed with all the information included in the plan and the consistency of the information and it’s clear the amount of preparation that has gone into making a product of this caliber, she expressed she’s excited about this new school year.

Acting Chairperson Burke made the following statement:

“I will say that in coming up on the advent of a new school year I was reflecting where we were at this time last August and last August there were many number of community groups that came together and worked diligently to put together three different type of school reopening plans, the full

in-person plan, the hybrid plan and the remote learning plan, and through all of those conversations the emphasis of the groups was to try to make sure that learning was robust, that learning was meaningful and that student's needs were put forward first. I think as the year went on we did everything we could to stay true to those goals at a time of great uncertainty and as we go into this year we have so much learning about how to handle schooling at such an uncertain time but the uncertainty persists and we are figuring it out as we go along, but through it all we continue to emphasize students' needs and student learning above all and one thing we have learned over the past year is that learning and student needs are met best when we're able to come together as a community in one place and that has been the emphasis looking at this year, how we can optimize in-person learning and robust learning opportunities to meet the needs of our students. I'm looking at my youngest going into his senior year of high school and I really hope that he has an experience more like the fall of 2018 than the fall of 2020, it's very gratifying to me to see things progress, the advent of the sports season, pre-school meetings, it might not be all that we hope but we have come a long way in the past year and sometimes you have to look back to see how fortunate you are"

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Superintendent Nelson made the following statement:

First and foremost, welcome back everyone. I know summer is not officially over – but it is certainly that time of the year where the start of the school year is on all our minds. This past summer was very productive for our school districts – where we reflected on our experiences last year, planned for the future, and now we are in the final stages of preparing for our students to return to our school buildings next week. I also want to acknowledge that I know that many of us were hoping for this school year to begin with a greater sense of normalcy for all. I know that we were hoping that many of the COVID-19 safety protocols and measures would not be needed during the 2021-2022 school. I was hoping for the same. Although we may not all agree on the best way to reopen schools – I am hoping we can all agree to support the greater good and the school community as a whole. The Tri-Town schools are strong and full of stakeholders that are excellent advocates for what is best for students. I respect that greatly and I am hoping we can do our best to respect one another as we welcome our students back to the classrooms. With that being said, we have made progress compared to how schools opened last year– this year we are fully opening our schools five days a week, full-time, to all of our students. We are looking to bring back more typical extracurricular activities, clubs and athletics for our students to participate in. We are committed to learning acceleration and focusing on teaching and learning. It is our hope that our students feel a strong sense of belonging to their schools and are ready for a meaningful school year. I know I will need the support of the school committees and all of our stakeholders to ensure that this school year is as successful as it can be. That concludes my superintendent report this evening.

V. General

A. Reopening Plan

Superintendent Nelson presented the “Back to School Plan for the 2021-2022 School Year” please refer to attachment A.

School Committee Feedback:

Ms. Marcolini expressed that she's hearing that some high schools are thinking about offering some vaccination clinics at some point and she just wondered if ORR was also planning some clinics.

Mr. Nelson expressed that the guidance is clear in terms of vaccination being one of the key components, he expressed it's an option for every student, parent and staff member to consider. He expressed that our town nurses have reached out to the school district in recent weeks and we will look at different options and partner with the local health officials as appropriate.

Ms. Reedy expressed that she is new to the Mattapoisett School Committee this year and she had a question. She thanked Mr. Nelson for his thorough presentation and providing the school committee with an incredible amount of information. She was wondering if the school district currently has a way to track the data associated with teacher/staff vaccination rates or is will we be tracking that to know where we stand currently and how close we are to the 80% mark we are come October 1st and if we are tracking it will that information be shared with the communities.

Mr. Nelson reported that some school committee members might remember that last year the school district published a weekly dashboard with key data points, recommendations and other information that he thought was critical for our school community to be aware of but also for our key decision makers to be aware as they made decisions in their school committee roles. He expressed that the dashboard will be updated and released on a weekly basis and the vaccination rates will be part of that data. Mr. Nelson expressed that he will work with our school nurses and town nurses on how best to collect that information to ensure the privacy of all.

Ms. Lavin echoed Ms. Reedy's sentiment about the presentation. Ms. Lavin asked Mr. Nelson to review mask exemptions and what the process a parent would need to follow if their child does need an exemption of some sort.

Mr. Nelson reported that when you review the DESE mask mandate they outline two key exemptions, one for medical reasons and one for behavior reasons. Mr. Nelson expressed that building administration would work with those particular families, he expressed that we would require a note from the child's pediatrician and we would then utilize our school physician in terms of the exemption would be granted or if there were other accommodations that would allow us to support those particular students.

Mr. Pires commended everyone in the school community for all their hard work and he expressed it's evident that their top priority is keeping our children safe and he's in total agreement. He expressed that with respect to the vaccination, he expressed that he appreciates the dashboard but at the same time in the spirit of equity we have to respect those who feel it is their personal choice, he expressed that at this time it's a sensitive issue, he expressed that some people feel uncomfortable about getting vaccinated and we have to respect them as well and the privacy and equally is very important.

Ms. Reedy wanted to clarify that she wasn't looking for specific names of people who have been vaccinated but rather percentage rates, so that we know and the community knows how close we are to reaching that 80% mark. Also she expressed that it's important to make note of the fact that the COVID vaccine is not protected under HIPA rights, so there is an individual protection as far as privacy to those who have received the vaccine and that was established by the government.

Mr. Pires expressed that he understood her intention and that at the end of the day it's all about kids feeling safe and comfortable within their peers and not singled out. Ms. Reedy agreed.

Ms. Kearns asked with we would be receiving additional CARES funding to help support the purchase of the air filters and air scrubbers for this year and any other testing that we need to do in the school setting.

Mr. Nelson reported that our districts like other districts across the state will receive ESSR I, II, III funding, at this point we expended ESSR I last year, ESSR II is currently being used for the purchase of air scrubbers and air purifiers and we also continue to seek additional grants such as the acceleration academy grant which helped fund the incredible opportunity for students across our

districts this summer as well as other grant opportunities in terms of a Special Education standpoint. Mr. Nelson expressed that ESSR III will come next, we have not submitted those grants, he expressed that particular process will involve getting feedback from our community as well in terms of some other areas, but he expressed that we do have those additional revenue sources to tap into. He also expressed that it's important to circle back to the budget process from last year, where the four budgets that we put forward, we prepared for a new normal and we didn't put in additional funding to prepare for the scenario that we are looking at right now, and we were strategic in knowing that the ESSR II and III could be available to navigate the reality of the situation.

Ms. Barrows expressed that this might have been covered last year, but she just wants to make sure that this year we have plenty of reserve of masks on buses and at school in case a child is sent to school without one.

Mr. Nelson gave a shout out to Mr. Gene Jones, Director of Facilities. He expressed that Mr. Jones has positioned the district very well when it comes to PPE, not only last year but also moving into this school year. He expressed that he feels very confident in the supply of PPE that the school district currently has in stock including face coverings and hand sanitizer to support our school nurses. And yes the buses will also have masks, we would never turn away a student from getting on the school bus.

Ms. Fernandes expressed that it's worthy to note that when the DESE board came together there was one member who voted against the mask mandate, she expressed that we know we will have families who will not be happy to have their children masked again, have you given thought to how those kids parents and needs will be addressed.

Mr. Nelson expressed that's one of the most difficult and complex pieces to this situation, he expressed that the district has sought and is looking at legal advice in terms of how to handle those scenarios. Mr. Nelson expressed that last year they were able to use their school physicians to be able to work through some of those difficult situations, and also expressed that he is working with administrators on how to handle each case in the moment, he expressed there is some strong guidance that allows school administrators to make some decisions in the moment to make sure we can protect the safety of all students but we also want to make sure we protect everyone's rights. He expressed that we are navigating that and we are aware that scenario may present itself and we will work through it on a case by case scenario.

Mr. Monteiro asked a question of Dr. Mendes, School Physician. Mr. Monteiro stated that some parents feel that it should be their choice if their child wears a mask to school or not, Mr. Monteiro's question to Dr. Mendes is *"could you please explain how my mask protects you and your mask protects me in the sense of source control versus respiratory protection?"*

Dr. Mendes stated *"effectively if we are both wearing masks and one of us is transmitting a germ that germ has to get through my mask and your mask, so it's like a double mask system."* He expressed that any barriers we put between two people will reduce transmission of any infectious agents whether they are masks, shields or plexi-glass. He reported especially when people don't have symptoms and are already infectious, having a mask on will protect people around them quite a bit.

Dr. Mendes expressed that it's hard to believe that we are still in this scenario with COVID-19 but he feels that DESE and the board and the Superintendent have done a great job trying to figure out ways to keep all the kids in school, he expressed that's really the point, he expressed it would be great not to have them wearing masks, but if we had to choose between a zoom classroom or an in-person classroom, we would much rather have in-person learning even if children have to wear

masks. He believes the masks will help keep transmission rates down and help keep our kids and our teachers and staff safe.

Ms. McSweeney expressed gratitude for all the comments that have been made and also for Mr. Nelson's presentation. Ms. McSweeney appreciates the fact that school will start with children and staff wearing masks but she's wondering about those families who still don't feel comfortable coming back into the school setting and may want the alternative of the homeschool option and how they can receive information about that option.

Mr. Nelson expressed that we do have families that on an annual basis choose the homeschool option, he reported that there is a policy and application process that is submitted to my office. Mr. Nelson expressed that last year and this year we did see an uptick in homeschool applications and that remains an option for those particular students. Mr. Nelson expressed that if a family does elect to homeschool their child, then they do assume the responsibility of educating their children with the exception and that's around if they receive special education services.

Ms. Burke explained that DESE has declared a fully remote model illegal for this upcoming school year, therefore that type of model is no longer available.

Ms. McSweeney expressed that she was aware of the difference but she thought it was important to bring up during the public meeting so that parents were aware of the difference.

Ms. Lavin wanted to ask a question that gets to the heart of teaching and learning and some of the angle around acceleration roadmap. She asked if Mr. Nelson could elaborate on a timeline when parents/community could hear an update on additional opportunities and next steps.

Mr. Nelson reported that he plans to continuously update the school committee at the regular scheduled meetings in terms of localizing the acceleration roadmap to our schools. He explained that there are four phases with priorities within it and it allows administrators and teachers to look at what the roadmap suggests and there are steps for success for you to consider and resources and templates for you to consult with. Mr. Nelson expressed that the bigger point is to think about what you're already doing in your district, what you're doing well, examining your local data, and creating opportunities to maximize student outcomes. He expressed that the early work really falls to administration which is to look at data and really look at what we have in place and then start thinking about a course of action of what programming we may need in the upcoming weeks, months and long term. Therefore, you will hear updates of how we are doing that work and what it means.

Mr. Monteiro asked if there was any current guidance in terms of snow days for the upcoming school year.

Mr. Nelson reported that as of right now we will only have traditional snow days.

Ms. Kearns wanted to touch upon the policy for absenteeism, she expressed that last year there was a deviation for absenteeism based on students going home after being tested or while quarantining, she was wondering how that would be handled this school year.

Mr. Nelson reported that last year depending on the scenario we did have the option of marking students remote present and that model or remote learning is no longer available therefore we can't mark students remote present, therefore per the current guidance students must be marked absent.

Ms. Rounseville thanked Mr. Nelson for the thorough presentation. She expressed she was interested in the testing component and wondered if a parent gave consent, would they be giving consent for the entire year? Ms. Rounseville expressed she believes will be a great benefit on the amount of days that children are out of school.

Mr. Nelson reported that it is a blanket consent for the year and that the DESE was clear that the local school district can't alter the consent form. Mr. Davidson added that parents can also pull the consent at any point during the school year.

Ms. Daniel expressed that with the testing there were the three options, if you were symptomatic, if you were a close contact, and then the pool testing, she expressed that she knows we are currently not doing the pool testing but that model could change at any point, therefore her question was if the parent signs the consent at the beginning of the year but they are not comfortable with their children taking part in the pool testing, how do we make that difference, will that be a problem?

Mr. Nelson reported that he doesn't have a clear answer for that question but once that information is released he will follow up with the school committee.

Ms. Beauregard asked if parents will be notified before their child is tested. Mr. Nelson reported that those protocols are currently being worked on with our school nurses, he reported that we have done a lot of work with CIC in terms of filling out paperwork and once those protocols are established we will share them with the school committees and parents.

Ms. Hartley and Ms. Burke thanked everyone for their thoughtful questions and thanked Mr. Nelson for his responses.

VI. New Business

D. Policy Review

EBCFA - FACE COVERINGS Policy – Superintendent Nelson informed the school committee that the policy sub-committee met on August 19th and considered presenting different options, however at this point due to the state DESE mandate that was just recently established by the Board of Education for the State of Massachusetts these options no longer need consideration therefore the Face Coverings Policy should be tabled.

OPEN COMMENTS:

Ms. Hartley thanked everyone for joining the school committee meeting and asked if anyone wanting to make a comment to write their name and address into the chat box and Ms. Russo will call out their name.

Ms. Burke reviewed the policy BEDH-E - GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

A School Committee Meeting is a meeting of a government body at which members of the body deliberate over public business. We welcome the attendance of members of the school district community to view your School Committee as it conducts its regular business meeting.

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter [30A Section 20\(f\)](#) governs public participation at open meetings covering all public bodies.

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(f) No person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the chair, and all persons shall, at the request of the chair, be silent. No person shall disrupt the proceedings of a meeting of a public body. If, after clear warning from the chair, a person continues to disrupt the proceedings, the chair may order the person to withdraw from the

meeting and if the person does not withdraw, the chair may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person from the meeting.

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- 1. Public Comment shall be for a period of 20 minutes and shall generally follow the opening of the meeting. The Committee reserves the right to rearrange its agenda to accommodate scheduled presenters.*
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- 3. Individuals may address topics on the agenda, items specified for public comment, or items within the scope of responsibility of the School Committee. The Chair shall rule out of order any individual who fails to honor the guidelines or who addresses a matter inappropriate for public comment.*
- 4. Any Committee member may direct questions to the speaker through the Chair in order to clarify comments of the speaker.*

Ms. Burke also explained that school committee members would not be answering any questions from the public at tonight's meeting but if parents needed questions answered they should reach out to central office or building administration.

OPEN COMMENTS:

Sandra Dawson- Rochester:

"Thank you for the opportunity to speak, I have a question, as far as the students who are quarantined, is there going to be a remote option to participate in class".

Ms. Hartley thanked Ms. Dawson for her question and encouraged her to contact the school.

Richard Riley – Mattapoissett:

"First of all, outstanding presentation, it's the first I've listened in, very nice. I've been a resident here over 60 years and it's the first zoom meeting of the school committee that I've watched. I have two questions but maybe I can send those in, I'd like to know and see the facts and the case studies that Commissioner Riley based his on, the reason I say this is two-fold, number one as some of you

might know we own a preschool in Town with over 100 children in and since we opened back up on June 29th of 2020 we haven't had a case, what we found was that parents were more concerned through fear everyone was masked up, they washed they're hands 10 times before they went in and 10 times after they left, but over time what they realized is that these kids are safe and nothing was going to happen to these kids, to the point now that 90% of the parents don't even wear a mask anymore and we have a waiting list that you would only dream about because they are at schools who do require masks and they are trying to get into our school but on another note on a higher level note, I'm part owner of a large manufacturing company with a 1000 employees in two locations and we hired someone to work with WHO and CDC because of the masks, because of the employees out on the floors, it's 85 degrees working with machines they were concerned wearing masks and what we found was that the typical blue masks that people wear, the influenza and SARS 2 has a size of .05 to .14 micron level and the blue masks only catch germs which are 3 microns or larger, in other words you would be better off having a screen from a window cover your mouth then the actual mask, it doesn't really prevent anything, so from a business point a view if it didn't stop or help the case study go down in our plants we actually ended up eliminating the masks, but if someone has a cold or they feel unhealthy they voluntarily wear the mask during that course until recovery and it's worked out beautifully, we have a facility in Ohio and a facility in Florida and that is now the procedure, it's on a voluntary basis but the masks are gone. I'm a little concerned about the kids especially my grandchildren having to go to school with masks, I can understand on the bus, I'll be patient, let's see how things go until October 1st but the first thing I'm going to do is look into an organization.... Ms. Russo indicated to Mr. Riley that his three minutes had ended.

Ms. Hartley thanked Mr. Riley for his comments.

Ms. Nina M. Datshkovsky Ennis had audio difficulties during the meeting and was not able to make her full statement during the meeting. Ms. Ennis sent her full statement to Superintendent Nelson, Ms. Russo, and Acting Chairpersons Burke and Hartley on August 27th at 9:53 via email. Below is her complete statement.

Re: Incomplete question/statement during the School Committee Meeting regarding Mask Mandates.

By this letter, I want to clarify that my computer's microphone was not working, and I proceed to ask a question using the Zoom chat. The first question that I asked was wrong, so in the chat I clarify, that this was not the complete question. I wrote the correct question three more times in a row, and it was not read at all, and the meeting was expedited till the end. I am not sure if Diane Russo, Executive Assistant of the Superintendent didn't see the chat or what happened.

My complete statement/question on the chat to the school committee during the meeting dated on August 26, 2021, was the following:

"If the mask protects me and protect others, so what about masks being harmful while wearing them for a long time?

Before you overthink, watch this video. A father is demonstrating unsafe levels being breathed by our children using the mask at Conway, NH School Board meeting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=OiEufblyJxM&feature=share>

It will be appreciated if you correct what I meant and watch the video I sent. Make your judgement and do your research.

Thank you so much. Have a wonderful day.

Sincerely, Nina M Datshkovsky Ennis

Linda Vivino – Marion

"My question is if the parents opt out of testing do the kids go home and quarantine".

Ms. Hartley asked Ms. Vivino to send that question to Supt. Nelson or the School Principal.

Ms. Hartley wanted to reiterate the school committees thanks to all who attended the meeting and made comments and concerns. She expressed that we are committed to working together as school committee members and the school district leaders and staff are working together to make sure that our students have the very best year of teaching and learning and remain safe.

Mr. Nelson expressed that tonight's meeting was just another example of our school community and the Tri-Town's overall commitment to doing what's best for students and families and listening to one another respectfully and he couldn't be more proud to serve as Superintendent of our six schools. Thank you for the opportunity to present our reopening plans.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 7:51 p.m.

District, Ms. McSweeney

Union, Ms. Daniel

District, Mr. Muse

Union, Ms. Lavin

ROLL CALL-District (Duggan: yes, Monteiro: yes, Marcolini: yes, Muse: yes, McSweeney: yes, Kearns: yes, Burke: yes, Tseki: yes)

ROLL CALL-Union (Barrows: yes, Fernandes: yes, Daniel: yes, Hartley: yes, Rounseville: yes, Rios: yes, Rounseville: yes, Lavin: yes, Beauregard: yes)

**JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY UNION #55**

August 26, 2021 – 6:30 p.m.

Zoom link:

<https://oldrochester-org.zoom.us/j/97883484317?pwd=VG1oc3NKRXZpanNRR3IyElFoNjJ4Zz09>

TIME: 6:30 p.m.

MEETING TO ORDER

OPEN COMMENTS

RECOGNITION

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORTS

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

- I. Consent Agenda
 - A. Approval of Minutes
 - 1. Regular Minutes: NONE
 - 2. Executive Session Minutes: NONE
- II. Old Business
- III. Agenda Items Pending
- IV. Special Topic Report
- V. **General**
 - A. **Reopening Plan**
- VI. **New Business**
 - A. Curriculum
 - B. Business
 - C. Personnel
 - D. **Policy Review**
- VII. School Committee
 - A. Reorganization (Union #55 Only)
- VIII. Future Business
 - A. Timeline
 - B. Future Agenda Items
- IX. Open Comments
- X. Information
- XI. Executive Session

ADJOURNMENT

**JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY UNION #55**

TO: Old Rochester Regional District School Committee and Massachusetts
School Superintendency Union #55
FROM: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools
DATE: August 20, 2021
SUBJECT: Agenda Items

The following items are on the agenda of August 26, 2021

V. General

A. Reopening Plan

Recommendation:

That the school committee hear an update from Superintendent Nelson.

VIII. Future Business

A. Timeline

The next meeting of the Joint School Committee will be held as follows:
September 23, 2021 (remotely through zoom)

Joint School Committee

The next meeting of the Joint School Committee will be held as follows:

- ❖ Reorganization (September/October)
- ❖ Budget Update (December)
- ❖ School Calendar (March)
- ❖ Budget Update (March)
- ❖ Approval of School Committee Dates (March)
- ❖ Professional Development Plan Approval (March)
- ❖ Superintendent's End-Cycle Evaluation (June 2022)

If you have any questions regarding any of these recommendations please feel free to call me.

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Old Rochester Regional School District MA Superintendency Union # 55

Back to School Plan
2021-2022

Updates to DESE Covid-19 Guidance:

The guidance in this slideshow was developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Public Health.

DESE/DPH Guidance Background & Context:

This school year all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week this fall. All previously-released Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Department of Public Health (DPH) health and safety requirements were lifted.

The most current DESE/DPH guidance driving our reopening plans:

- [DESE/DPH COVID-19 Guidance for Districts and Schools: Fall 2021 \(July 30, 2021\)](#)
- [DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios - SY 2021-2022 \(August 13, 2021\)](#)
- [DESE/DPH Frequently Asked Questions \(August 20, 2021\)](#)
- [Implementation of DESE Mask Requirement \(August 25, 2021\)](#)

Other major agency guidance considered:

- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools](#)

Our reopening plans aim to educate all of our students in-person, full-time, five days a week as possible. We identified and implemented mitigation strategies and safety measures that aim to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within our buildings, while moving teaching and learning forward.

DESE and DPH continue to recommend that all faculty, staff, and eligible students receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

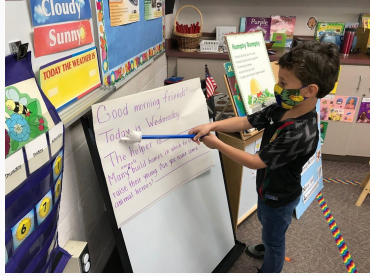
Implementation of the Fall 2021 DESE/DPH Recommendations:

Maintaining Ventilation Upgrades from this Past Year:

- All our schools' HVAC systems were inspected by an outside vendor (Leftfield Environmental Limited) at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year and given 'full occupancy' status. All school buildings will be inspected once again this Fall.
- Air purifiers and air scrubbers were ordered for all learning spaces in our six schools. We are anticipating their arrival soon.
- Routine air quality assessment (CO2 levels) will be conducted by our Director of Facilities.
- Air quality tests are conducted at all our schools utilizing an outside vendor (ARAM Environmental Testing) to ensure safe and healthy learning environments.



Masking in Schools:



- Masks are required for public schools students (age 5 and above) and staff in all grades through at least October 1, 2021 when indoors (including sports-related activity for student-athletes and coaches when indoors). It is strongly recommended that students younger than age 5 also wear a mask in school. Masks are not required when outdoors.
- The mask requirement will be in place until at least October 1, 2021. The Commissioner will revisit the requirement in the near future to revise it as warranted by public health data.
- The mask requirement applies when students and staff are indoors at school, except when eating, drinking, and during mask breaks.
- Mask breaks may occur throughout the school day when the windows are open or students are outdoors. As a reminder, meals and outdoor recess provide built-in mask breaks for students and staff.
- Masks may also be removed indoors when necessary to participate in elective classes, such as the use of wind instruments in band.
- After October 1, 2021, if a school demonstrates a vaccination rate of 80% or more of students and staff in the school, then vaccinated individuals in that school would no longer be subject to the DESE mask requirement. DESE will provide additional information to the public in coming weeks.

Testing Services & Options this School Year:

- Districts and schools are highly encouraged to maintain or establish a robust plan for COVID-19 testing in schools for students and staff.
- Our districts received approval from DESE to start with 'symptomatic testing' and 'test and stay'.
- We have secured a floating school nurse to support our safety and health protocols and will have CIC agency support.

Symptomatic Testing

- **For when individuals present symptoms while at school;** individuals should not go to school if experiencing symptoms while at home
- Samples are collected at school using **the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test**
- Those testing **negative with isolated/mild symptoms can stay** in school

"Test and Stay"

Close contact testing

- For when individuals are in close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual while at school.
- Samples are collected at school **using the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test**
- Tests are **administered daily for at least five days** from the date of exposure

Routine COVID Pooled Testing

- **Routine Pooled Testing and School-Based Follow-Up Testing:** samples are collected at school; If a pool is positive, follow-up testing at school with **either BinaxNOW and/or individual PCR testing as necessary**
- **Routine Pooled Testing and Lab-Based Follow-Up Testing:** samples are collected; If a pool is positive, **individual Follow-Up testing occurs at the lab**, without a second sample collection

COVID-19 Symptoms:

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves.

COVID-19 symptoms list:

- ***Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills***
- ***Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath***
- ***New loss of taste or smell***
- ***Muscle aches or body aches***
- **Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)*
- *Sore throat, when in combination with other symptoms*
- *Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea when in combination with other symptoms*
- *Headache when in combination with other symptoms*
- *Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms*
- *Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms*



Anyone who is feeling sick or ill should remain home and strongly consider being tested for COVID-19.

Definition of Close Contact:

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts: Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Classroom close contacts: An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Bus close contacts: Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days: An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:
 - o The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness AND
 - o The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.



Recommended Testing & Quarantine Response Protocols

Protocol A

Individuals who test positive

Protocol B

asymptomatic close contacts who are not exempt
from testing and quarantine response protocols

Protocol C

Symptomatic individuals



Classroom & Learning Space Social Distancing

- Our schools will establish 3 feet of social distancing between students and staff members.
- Electives such as chorus and band will also maximize social distancing opportunities.
- Social distancing travel patterns and protocols will be implemented in our school buildings.

**Social Distancing guidelines will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



Transportation Protocols & Safety Measures

- ALL students and bus drivers are required to wear masks on the bus.
- ALL bus windows will be open at a minimum of two inches.





School-Based Testing Options

- Our schools received approval for 'Symptomatic Testing' and 'Test and Stay' programming.
- Parents/Guardians must provide consent (forthcoming) for such testing to occur.
- Individuals may still utilize outside testing options.

**Testing options will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



School Building Visitors

- All visitors are also expected to wear a mask in the school building through at least October 1, 2021.
- Visitors are highly recommended to schedule appointments with building administration.

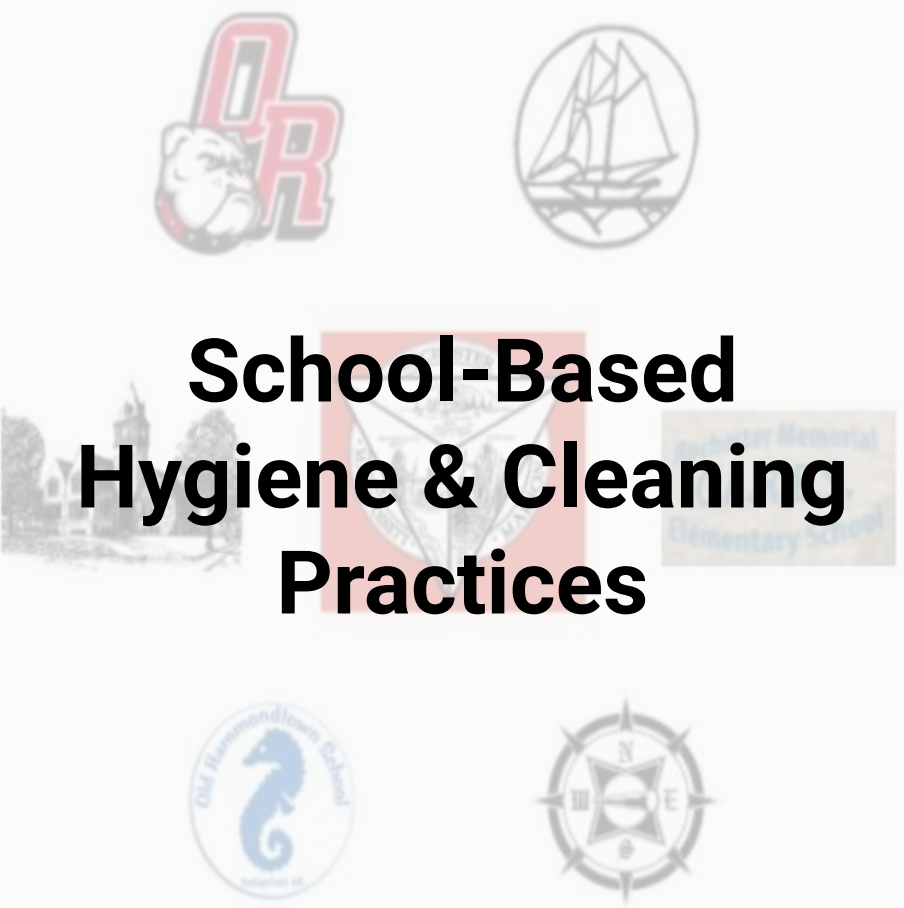
**School visitor guidelines will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



Breakfast & Lunch

- Dining spaces will strive for 3 feet of social distancing between individuals.
- Outdoor dining will be an option for students and staff members as appropriate.
- Breakfast and lunch will continue to be free for ALL students during the 2021-2022 school year.

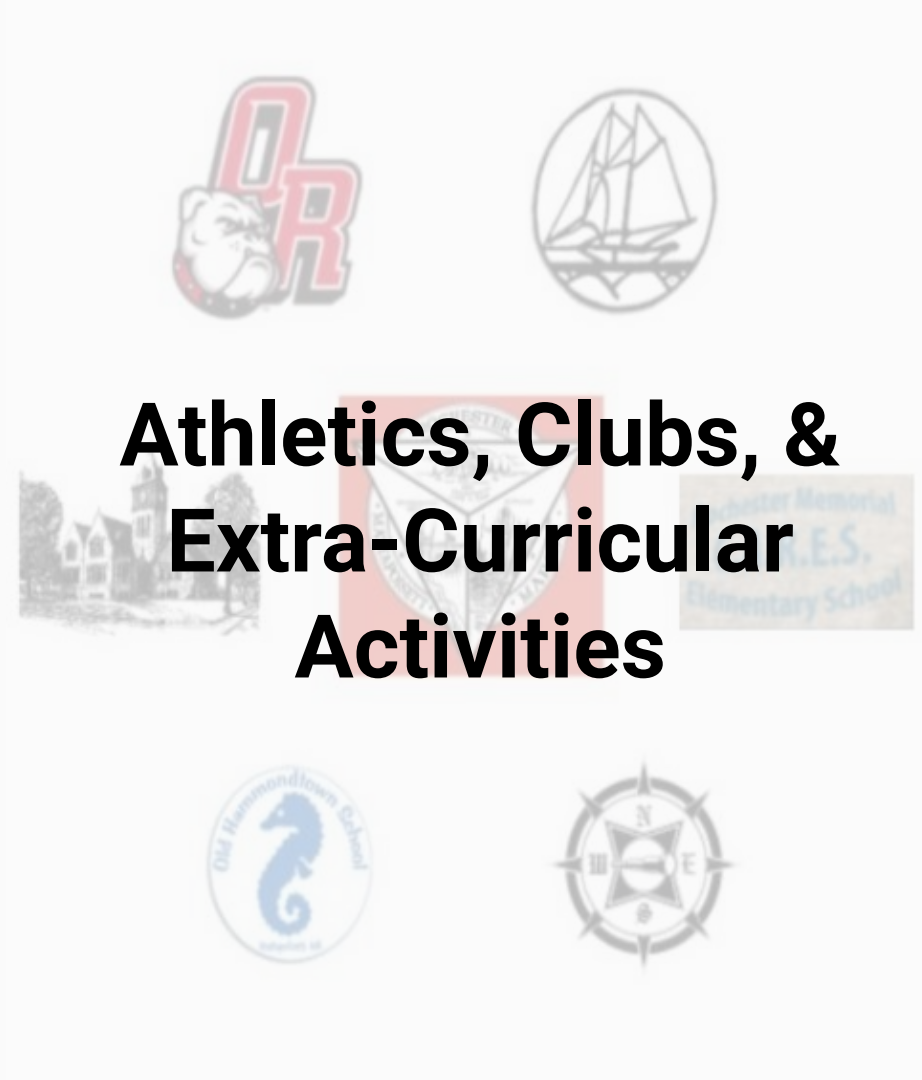
**Dining guidelines will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



School-Based Hygiene & Cleaning Practices

- Hand sanitizing stations will be located throughout each building and in each classroom.
- Staff and students will be encouraged to frequently participate in hand sanitizing and/or hand washing.
- Each school building will be deep cleaned each school day.

**Hygiene and cleaning protocols will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



Athletics, Clubs, & Extra-Curricular Activities

- In-person clubs, activities, and extracurricular activities will be offered to students using the same protocols as the school day (i.e. mask expectations, social distancing).
- Athletics will follow local guidance and MIAA protocols

**Athletics/Activities guidelines will be reevaluated on a continuous basis throughout the school year based on the latest agency guidance and local data.*



Teaching & Learning

- Our schools will utilize the DESE Acceleration Roadmap this year to ensure our focus is on teaching & learning.
- Learning Acceleration is when all students receive consistent access to appropriate grade-level work. The three main pillars of learning acceleration are:
 - *Sense of Belonging*
 - *Monitoring Students' Understanding*
 - *Ensuring Strong Grade-Appropriate Instruction*



Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools

- Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority.
- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as screening testing.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Many schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households and support in-person learning.
- Localities should monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage, screening testing, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on the level of layered prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, screening testing).



The purpose of this guidance is to continue to support communities, local leadership in education and public health, and pediatricians collaborating with schools in creating policies for safe schools during the COVID-19 pandemic that foster the overall health of children, adolescents, educators, staff, and communities and are based on available evidence.

- **All eligible individuals should receive the COVID-19 vaccine.**
 - It may become necessary for schools to collect COVID-19 vaccine information of staff and students and for schools to require COVID-19 vaccination for in-person learning.
 - Adequate and timely COVID-19 vaccination resources for the whole school community must be available and accessible.
- **All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at school (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use).**
 - **The AAP recommends universal masking in school at this time for the following reasons:**
 - a significant portion of the student population is not eligible for vaccination
 - protection of unvaccinated students from COVID-19 and to reduce transmission
 - lack of a system to monitor vaccine status among students, teachers and staff
 - potential difficulty in monitoring or enforcing mask policies for those who are not vaccinated; in the absence of schools being able to conduct this monitoring, universal masking is the best and most effective strategy to create consistent messages, expectations, enforcement, and compliance without the added burden of needing to monitor vaccination status
 - possibility of low vaccination uptake within the surrounding school community
 - continued concerns for variants that are more easily spread among children, adolescents, and adults

- An added benefit of universal masking is protection of students and staff against other respiratory illnesses that would take time away from school.
- Adequate and timely COVID-19 testing resources must be available and accessible.
- It is critically important to develop strategies that can be revised and adapted depending on the level of viral transmission and test positivity rate throughout the community and schools, recognizing the differences between school districts, including urban, suburban, and rural districts.
- School policies should be adjusted to align with new information about the pandemic; administrators should refine approaches when specific policies are not working.¹²
- Schools must continue to take a multi-pronged, layered approach to protect students, teachers, and staff (ie, vaccination, universal mask use, ventilation, testing, quarantining, and cleaning and disinfecting). Combining these layers of protection will make in-person learning safe and possible. Schools should monitor the implementation and effectiveness of these policies.
- Schools should monitor the attendance of all students daily inclusive of in-person and virtual settings. Schools should use multi-tiered strategies to proactively support attendance for all students, as well as differentiated strategies to identify and support those at higher risk for absenteeism.
- School districts must be in close communication and coordinate with state and/or local public health authorities, school nurses, local pediatric practitioners, and other medical experts.
- School COVID-19 policies should be practical, feasible, and appropriate for child and adolescent's developmental stage and address teacher and staff safety.
 - Special considerations and accommodations to account for the diversity of youth should be made, especially for populations facing inequities, including those who are medically fragile or complex, have developmental challenges, or have disabilities. Children and adolescents who need customized considerations should not be automatically excluded from school unless required in order to adhere to local public health mandates or because their unique medical needs would put them at increased risk for contracting COVID-19 during current conditions in their community.
- School policies should be guided by supporting the overall health and well-being of all children, adolescents, their families, and their communities and should also look to create safe working environments for educators and school staff. This focus on overall health and well-being includes addressing the behavioral/mental health needs of students and staff.
- These policies should be consistently communicated in languages other than English, when needed, based on the languages spoken in the community, to avoid marginalization of parents/guardians of limited English proficiency or who do not speak English.
- Ongoing federal, state, and local funding should be provided for all schools so they can continue to implement all the COVID-19 mitigation and safety measures required to protect students and staff. Funding to support virtual learning and provide needed resources should continue to be available for communities, schools, and children facing limitations implementing these learning modalities in their home (eg, socioeconomic disadvantages) or in the event of school re-closure because of a resurgence of SARS-CoV-2 in the community or a school outbreak.

Final Thoughts:

- Our health and safety measures and protocols must remain fluid.
- Teaching and learning is our main priority.
- The social emotional well being of our children is our focus.

Questions?