

October 28, 2020

Dear Parents, Caregivers, and Students,

Thank you for your patience as we respond to our first two positive cases of COVID since school has started. I'm sure all of you have had heightened anxiety due to this situation. I want to reassure you that the district continues to be vigilant in following our reopening plan. Our plan identifies what to do if we have positive cases on pages 54 and 55. These guidelines come directly from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We are following them step by step.

I want to let everyone know that as of today, we have had no positive cases of COVID among our teachers or staff. We have contacted the Department of Public Health (DPH) to review the guidelines for school closure. DPH is not recommending full closure at this time. DPH and I agree to check in whenever a new case is identified to ensure our schools remain safe.

Several community members are asking why November 4, 2020, is the date of the return for students. The CDC recommends 14 days of quarantine. The quarantine period begins from when the person who has COVID is identified as contagious by DPH and when others are exposed to them. These dates may be different than when the school district was notified that a person had COVID.

Another question is if either towns' data turns yellow or red, will our programming change to hybrid or remote. At the August school committee, I stated that there would be a change if our color changed. At that time, the local districts were responsible for making that determination. DESE later notified us that the practice changed. The district is now required to work with DPH and DESE to determine if a school or the district should close.

I have enclosed the information from DESE and the CDC on this for your review. You may also reference the districts reopening plan, which can be found using the following link: <http://www.arrsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Fall-Reopening-Plan-Final.pdf>

Lastly, I am available for questions via my email at dfernandes@arrsd.org, by calling my office directly at 978-249-2400, or you may join me for a zoom meeting Wednesday at 6:30 PM. Information on the zoom meeting can be found below:

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Darcy Fernandes

Darcy Fernandes is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Parent Caregiver Meeting

Time: Oct 28, 2020 06:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84533755568?pwd=aDJSbDBkV2oyYno3RDA3WmpIWFNKZz09>

Meeting ID: 845 3375 5568

Passcode: 366871

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,84533755568# US (Chicago)

+19292056099,,84533755568# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Meeting ID: 845 3375 5568

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kda3mZXNy>

DESE

How do we know if we need to suspend in-person learning for our school or district?

There is no one threshold or metric that indicates a school or district should suspend in-person learning. District and school leaders can work closely with DESE's COVID Reporting Unit (781-338-3500) when there is a positive case in their district to determine the appropriate next steps. These next steps can include implementing existing DESE protocols to notify close contacts for testing and isolation, conferring with local public health and/or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to determine if transmission is occurring in the class or school, or seeking advice on whether to suspend in-person learning for that class, grade, or school. It is important to note that these decisions need to be made based on local context, occur in collaboration with DESE and the local board of health, and may be based on the following factors:

- If there is a need for an extensive cleaning of the building or other facility mitigation
- If the mobile testing unit results, or other test results, suggest widespread transmission is occurring

- If there are widespread absences among students and staff due to illness
- If the school is in a district reported as “red” on the DPH health metric for the past three weeks, and risk of transmission to students and/or staff is increased

The school department and the local board of health may have other local factors that are important to consider when making this decision.

CDC

Making decisions about school operations

Administrators should make decisions in collaboration with local health officials based on a number of factors, including the [level of community transmission](#), whether cases are identified among students, teachers, or staff, what other indicators local public health officials are using to assess the status of COVID-19, and whether student, teacher, and staff cohorts are being implemented within the school.

What is the level of community transmission?

There are specific strategies schools can implement based on the [level of community transmission](#) reported by local health officials:

If there is [no to minimal community transmission](#), reinforcing everyday preventive actions, ensuring [proper ventilation](#) within school facilities, including buses, and maintaining cleaning and disinfection practices remain important. These actions can help minimize potential exposure. Schools should also monitor absenteeism among teachers, staff, and students to identify trends and determine if absences are due to COVID-19, symptoms that led to quarantine, concerns about being in the school environment and personal health and safety, or positive test results. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 should [stay home and self-isolate](#) for the timeframe recommended by public health officials. Anyone who has had [close contact](#) with someone who has tested positive or is symptomatic for COVID-19 should stay home until receiving a negative result, or [stay home and monitor for symptoms](#).

If there is minimal to moderate community transmission, schools should follow the actions listed above, and continue implementing mitigation strategies such as [social distancing](#), use of [masks](#), reinforcing everyday preventive actions, and maintaining cleaning and disinfection. This also can include ensuring that student and staff groupings/cohorts are as static as possible and that mixing groups of students and staff is limited.

If there is [substantial, controlled](#) transmission, significant mitigation strategies are necessary. These include following all the actions listed above and also ensuring that student and staff groupings/cohorts are as static as possible with limited mixing of student and staff groups, field trips and large gatherings and events are canceled, and communal spaces (e.g., cafeterias, media centers) are closed.

If there is [substantial, uncontrolled](#) transmission, schools should work closely with local health officials to make decisions on whether to maintain school operations. The health, safety, and wellbeing of students, teachers, staff and their families is the most important consideration in determining whether school closure is a necessary step. Communities can support schools staying open by implementing strategies that decrease a community's level of transmission. However, if community transmission levels cannot be decreased, school closure is an important consideration. Plans for virtual learning should be in place in the event of a school closure.

Did a student or staff member test positive for SARS-CoV-2?

If someone within the school community (e.g., student, teacher, staff) tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, assessing the level of risk is important to determine if, when, and for how long part or all of a school should be closed. K-12 administrators can also refer to CDC's [Interim Considerations for K-12 for School Administrators for SARS-CoV-2 Testing](#), which provides additional information about [viral diagnostic testing](#). A single case of COVID-19 in a school would not likely warrant closing the entire school, especially if levels of community transmission are not high. The levels of community transmission described above and the extent of [close contacts](#) of the individual who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 should all be considered before closing. These variables should also be considered when determining how long a school, or part of the school, stays closed. If the transmission of the virus within a school is higher than that of the community, or if the school is the source of an outbreak, administrators should work collaboratively with local health officials to determine if temporary school closure is necessary. Students, teachers, and staff who test positive or had close contact of the individual who tested positive should be provided with guidance for when it is safe to [discontinue self-isolation](#) or end [quarantine](#).

What other indicators are local public health officials using to assess the status of COVID-19?

Local health officials can help inform decisions related to school operations by examining public health [indicators](#) " that are used to determine level of community transmission and disease severity levels. For example, indicators such as healthcare capacity (e.g., staffing, ICU bed occupancy), changes in newly identified COVID-19 cases, and percentage of people testing positive for SARS-CoV-2 infections in the community might be useful to determine whether to maintain or modify school operations. These indicators are set by state, local, tribal, and territorial health and healthcare officials, and should be shared with schools for decision making.

Is a cohort approach used within the school? The level of student and staff mixing within the school should also be considered. If students are kept in cohorts to minimize mixing of students, exposure to an individual with COVID-19 may be limited to one particular cohort and not pose a broad risk to the rest of the school. Cohorts that have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 can switch to virtual learning and stay home in accordance with CDC's guidelines for [quarantine](#) and [self-isolation](#), and the school may remain open.