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RETURN TO IN-PERSON LEARNING GUIDELINES

GRADES PRE-K THROUGH SEVEN

Effective April 5, 2021

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

March 23, 2021

I. Introduction

1. Overview

Commissioner of Education Riley requested emergency authorization from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to make decisions regarding hybrid and remote learning models. Specifically, the Commissioner requested to have the authority to mandate school districts to eliminate any hybrid-learning model and to resume in-person learning for students, effective the first week in April.

The Board of Education voted on March 5, 2021 to grant authority to the Commissioner, to exercise his discretion to increase the in-person learning for students. It requires the Commissioner to consult with state health officials and medical experts, that students may safely attend classes, in an in-person setting, consistent with the health and safety requirements that have been adopted for the pandemic period.

On March 9, 2021 the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released [new guidelines](#) for the return to student in-person learning model.

2. DESE Expectations Effective April 5, 2021

Effective April 5, 2021, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will no longer accept the hybrid-learning model, in grades K through 7. The learning model options will be in-person learning or remote learning through the last day of school on June 18, 2021.

3. Physical Distance in Classroom Research

Effectiveness of three versus six feet of physical distancing for controlling spread of COVID-19 among primary and secondary students and staff: A retrospective, state-wide cohort study. <https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciab230/6167856>

According to the article published by the Oxford University Press for the Infectious Diseases Society of America 2021, national and international guidelines differ about the optimal physical distancing between students for prevention of SARS-CoV-2 transmission. In this study, the objective was to compare incident cases of SARS-CoV-2 in students and staff in Massachusetts public schools among districts with different physical distancing requirements.

Among 251 eligible school districts, 537,336 students and 99,390 staff attended in-person instruction during the 16-week study period, representing 6,400,175 student learning weeks and 1,342,574 staff learning weeks. Student case rates were similar in the 242 districts with ≥ 3 feet versus ≥ 6 feet of physical distancing between students;

results were similar after adjusting for community incidence. Cases among school staff in districts with ≥ 3 feet versus ≥ 6 feet of physical distancing were also similar. The study concluded that lower physical distancing policies can be adopted in school settings with masking mandates without negatively impacting student or staff safety.

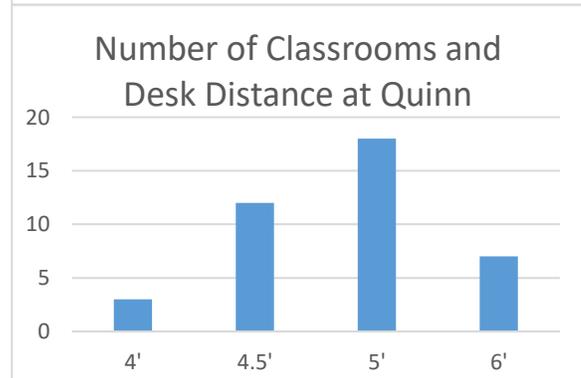
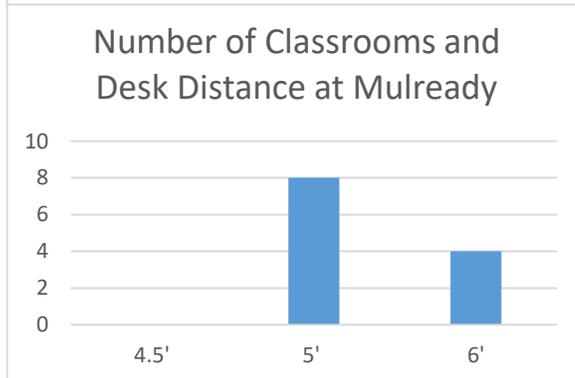
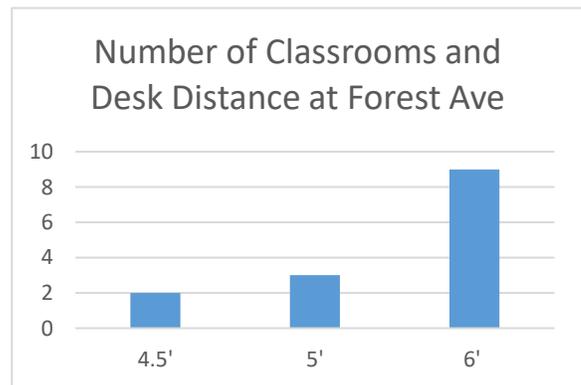
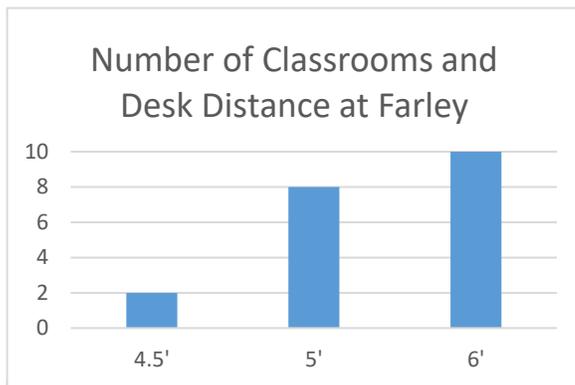
II. District's Actions in Response to DESE Guidelines

1. Return to In-Person Learning Model Advisory Committee

In anticipation of the release of the new guidelines, the District convened a committee to analyze the District's conditions and DESE's return to in-person learning guidelines. The committee was also tasked to make recommendations to the return to in-person learning plan. The committee included principals, central office administrators, directors of technology and buildings and grounds, the coordinator of health services, and an HEA president.

2. Classroom Inventory

The buildings and grounds staff, in collaboration with building administrators, surveyed every classroom at Farley Elementary, Forest Ave Elementary, Mulready Elementary, and Quinn Middle School to secure desk distance measurements for the increased in-person student participation. The charts below demonstrates the revised arrangement for student physical distance in our classrooms.



3. Parent/Guardian Survey – Grades K – 7

According to DESE guidelines, Districts were required to survey families to determine their choice between full in-person and remote learning. 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.

On March 11, 2021, the District released a [survey for families](#) to communicate with the District their preference of learning model from April 5, 2021 through June 18, 2021. The survey period ran from March 11th through March 18th. Once the survey period ends, no late requests will be considered and there will be no further changes to a child’s learning model through end of the school year.

The request for cohort change are as follows:

From Hybrid-Learning Model to Full Remote Model				
Grade	Farley	Forest Ave	Mulready	Quinn
2	1	0	0	-
6	-	-	-	1
Total	1	0	0	1

From Full Remote Model to In-Person Learning Model				
Grade	Farley	Forest Ave	Mulready	Quinn
K	1	0	3	-
1	1	8	0	-
2	4	1	5	-
3	1	4	4	-
4	3	5	2	-
5	-	-	-	23
6	-	-	-	15
7	-	-	-	18
Total	10	18	14	56

4. Classroom Space and Desk Configuration

In order to optimize desk configuration in some classrooms to ensure greater physical distance among students, the District has utilized ESSER funding to purchase 225 student desks and 509 chairs to replace the large tables currently in use in some elementary classrooms. Individual desks will provide greater flexibility when determining appropriate classroom space and physical distance configuration for our students.

5. Food Service

Chartwells, our food service provider, has been preparing our cafeterias to accommodate the increase in students receiving meals daily. Chartwells is also increasing staff to support daily operations.

III. **Components to Safeguard Successful Student Return to In-Person Learning Model**

1. Welcoming Students

Whether students are entering the school building for the first time or are returning to their previously assigned school building, we are preparing for a smooth transition back to school. Principals will ensure that all students returning to in-person learning this year receive the proper attention and care as they engage with the new school routine for the last ten weeks of school.

2. Schedule for In-Person Learning Model

- a. Students assigned to the in-person learning model will attend school, five-days per week, during the normal school hours of operation.
- b. Wednesdays will be a full day of instruction. It will no longer be a remote learning day.
- c. Pre-school Program – Students with Disabilities will attend school five-days per week with no remote option. Typically developing preschoolers may resume attending school four days per week on a tuition basis. The Student Services Department will contact families regarding pre-school tuition adjustments.

3. Technology

All students, grades PreK-7, were issued a district device at the beginning of the year. Students need to continue bringing their devices, between home and school, on a daily basis for the in-person learning. Students in grades Prek-4 were issued a carrying case and students must use this carrying case at all times when transporting their device. All devices are expected to be fully charged when they are brought to school. Students will not share their device with one another. Students may not bring their own device to school to use.

4. Schedule for Full Remote Learning Model

- a. Students assigned to full remote learning model, or Cohort D, will continue to receive education remotely.
- b. Wednesdays will be a full day of instruction.

5. Classroom Organization

- a. Each classroom has been evaluated to ensure maximum student physical distancing. The size of the classroom and student enrollment are determinant

factors for the physical distance at each individual classroom. After making the appropriate adjustments following the parent/guardian survey, the aggregate classroom data are as follows:

Desk Physical Distance	Number of Classrooms	Percentage of Classrooms
6 feet	30	35%
5 feet	37	43%
4.5 feet	16	19%
4 feet	3	3%
Total	86	100%

6. Transportation

- a. DESE released [revised guidelines for transportation](#) on February 11, 2021. The revised guidelines focus on physical distancing requirements, which is based on new data and in consultation with DESE’s medical advisors. The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has also reviewed and endorsed the updated guidance. DESE’s revisions to this guidance are based on data demonstrating significant air exchanges on moving school buses with open windows, as well as, the continued proven effectiveness of masking. The guidance differentiates between elementary schools, and middle/high schools, based on evidence that younger students are less likely to become infected and may be less likely to transmit the COVID-19 virus.

As of February 11, 2021, physical distancing guidelines and resulting bus capacities have been updated. 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 tables below demonstrate the revised bus routes, the number of students per seat, and the number of students sharing a seat at each route.

Quinn Middle School			Forest Ave Elementary School		
Route	Student Count	Sharing Seat	Route	Student Count	Sharing Seat
1	14		6	19	
2	16		9	21	
3	16		10	16	
4	28	3 students	11	15	
5	20		12	13	
6	14		17	3	
7	14		19	19	
9	17	2 students	Total	106	
10	16				
12	17		Farley Elementary School		
19	22		Route	Student Count	Sharing Seat
Total	194		1	28	
			2	18	
			3	27	2 students
Mulready Elementary School			4	33	
Route	Student Count	Sharing Seat	Total	106	
5	12				
7	30	1 student			
8	26				
Total	68				

- b. Any parent/guardian whose child is eligible for transportation, and would like this service, they must make a request through the District's website. To request transportation, please access the [form here](#).

7. Cafeteria

- a. Breakfast and lunch will continue to be served daily. During meals, students will be seated at the cafeteria tables observing the following formats: 1) seats placed 6 feet apart (elementary schools) and 2) four students per table with plexi-glass dividers (middle and high school).
- b. All students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch daily through June 18, 2021. No registration or identification needed.

8. Sanitization and Air Quality

- a. The [District protocol to sanitize our facilities](#) will continue daily and nightly. We have established a sophisticated sanitization routine to ensure our facilities are safe and ready to support in-person learning.
- b. The District invested in the Needle Point Bi-Polar Ionization Units for all buildings. This state of the art enhancement to the air filtration system is 99.4% effective eliminating COVID, MERSA, Norovirus, and other pathogens.

9. Student Attendance

- a. Effective April 5, 2021, the remote learning option is no longer available to students assigned to in-person learning. Students are expected to be in school every day and on time. Attendance will be taken daily.
- b. Students assigned to the Remote Learning Model are expected to participate in all daily classes and activities held virtually.
- c. Exceptions:
 - i. If a student presents with symptoms associated with COVID-19 and is dismissed, the student will receive remote academic support until he/she has been tested and can return to school.
 - ii. If a student is deemed a close contact at school or at home and he/she needs to be quarantined, the student will receive remote academic support during the quarantine period.
 - iii. If a student is quarantined due to travel restrictions, the student will receive remote academic support during the mandated quarantine period.
 - iv. Academic support will vary according to the school and/or grade level. Each building will evaluate the need of the student(s) and will develop a course of action to engage students while learning remotely.
- d. Students who are absent from school due to vacation or other family obligations will be marked absent. There is no longer a remote option.

10. Safety Protocols

All mitigating protocols that have contributed to the District's ability to maintain a safe school environment for all staff and students and to prevent the spread of the virus will continue to be in place.

- a. Facial Covering
All students and staff are required to wear a mask or face shield. Mask breaks will be provided.
- b. Social Distancing
All students and staff are required to follow the social distance guidelines applied to their particular building.
- c. Hand Washing
All students and staff are required to exercise good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently or by using hand sanitizer available in every classroom, offices and other areas.

11. Contact Tracing

- a. The process to conduct contact tracing in the District will not change. Our current contact tracing process has a stellar record of effectiveness and will continue to be deployed.
- b. Contact tracing is inclusive to school buildings, outside activity areas, buses, and any other area identified by the nurses and administrators conducting the contact tracing.
- c. The District will continue to collaborate with the Town's Department of Public Health for contact tracing and protocol development.

IV. CONCLUSION

The prospects of returning to school in-person learning on April 5th is both exciting and gratifying. Schools returning to full operations validates our feelings of anticipation that life is slowly returning to a more stable level. In August of 2020, when school districts were tasked with developing three learning models; in-person, hybrid, and remote, the in-person model seemed a distant possibility as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to evolve and to cause havoc.

In September, when school personnel returned to work, the collective feeling of anxiety, stress, and fear was palpable and overwhelming. Yet, the single focus of how to duplicate classroom experiences virtually and how to create a learning community that could exist in all models was at the forefront for every educator.

Fast forward to March. The same educators are now, more confident and better equipped than ever before, to welcome our students back to school and to embrace another transition.

Together, we will continue to provide our students with the best experience possible and we are aiming for a strong finish to this unprecedented academic year.