



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

EMILY J. PARKS
Superintendent of Schools

August 20, 2021

Dear WPS Families:

I hope you are having a wonderful summer! We look forward to welcoming students back for the 2021-2022 school year on Wednesday, September 1st!

Next week you will receive a communication from the District with information about a number of back-to-school tasks to complete, such as updating emergency contact information, reviewing student handbooks, and creating/updating lunch accounts. In the meantime, I want to update you on our plans to create a safe and healthy environment for our school community as we continue to deal with the challenges of COVID-19.

Earlier in the summer, school districts received guidance from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Department of Public Health (DPH), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The Westwood School Committee and the District leadership team have reviewed those guidance documents, consulted with our local public health officials, and sought additional input from our medical advisors with the goal of making sure that students are able to learn in person, safely, and with as few interruptions as possible. After a very different year last year, we also want to get back to interactive and collaborative instructional practices that we know support students' academic, social, and emotional growth. In order to do so, we will be implementing a layered approach to mitigation measures prioritizing the things that have the greatest impact on our ability to move back toward "normal" school:

Vaccination:

Our medical and public health partners emphasize that the most important prevention and mitigation tool at our disposal, both for the safety of individuals and the community, is vaccination. Our vaccination rates in Westwood are relatively high, though there is still room to increase them. To support this effort, the District will be hosting vaccination clinics in the beginning of September. The first clinic will be September 3rd. Details will be available soon.

Daily Symptom Checks/Staying Home When Sick:

Families will be expected to check their students for symptoms every morning. Symptomatic individuals (whether vaccinated or unvaccinated) must remain home until they are symptom-free and have received a negative PCR test. (So long as the individual is not a close contact, if a medical professional makes an *alternative diagnosis* for COVID-19-like symptoms, the individual may use this recommendation in lieu of a PCR test.)

Routine Weekly Pool Testing:

The District will continue to offer routine weekly pool testing through MA DESE's free testing program for all students and staff. The state has changed testing vendors which, unfortunately, means we will not be able to rollover the consent forms and registrations from last year. Instructions for those who are interested in registering to participate in the program will be available as soon as it is available to us.

Quarantining Protocols

Last year, contact tracing and quarantining were important mitigation tools. Though these strategies were important for health and safety, they resulted in many students missing several days of school. Two

important changes in the DPH protocols this year should decrease time out of school when it is determined that someone may have been exposed to a positive individual:

- **Close contacts who are fully vaccinated are exempt from the quarantining requirements as long as they remain asymptomatic.**
- Unvaccinated close contacts will have the option of staying in school if they are asymptomatic and participate in the “**test and stay**” protocol, which allows students to remain in school as long as they engage daily rapid antigen testing and receive a negative result every day for 7 days. (For details, see page 7, Protocol B-1, of the August 13, 2021 [DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID Scenarios](#).)
- Students who choose not to participate in the “test and stay” protocol will be subject to the traditional quarantining requirement (e.g. quarantine for at least 7 days and receive a negative COVID test on day 5 or later or quarantine for at least 10 days). (For details, see pages 7 and 8, Protocols B-2 and B-3, of the August 13, 2021 [DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID Scenarios](#).)

Face Coverings/Masking:

At its [meeting on August 17th](#), the School Committee determined that its current face covering/masking policy will remain in place in September, subject to periodic review in light of public health metrics such as community transmission. The [current policy](#) is that all individuals must wear a face covering/mask while inside school buildings and on school buses, except during lunch, snack, and mask breaks. Masks are not required outdoors.

Ventilation:

The District will continue to employ the ventilation strategies that it put in place last year, including the use of MERV-13 filters in our HVAC systems, maximizing the intake of fresh air through our mechanical systems, and increasing fresh air by opening windows to the extent feasible. Spaces without a fresh air source will use HEPA filters.

Hand Hygiene:

The District will continue to encourage good hand hygiene with frequent hand-washing and make hand sanitizers available throughout our buildings.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Practices:

Our Operations Department will continue to employ effective products and practices to keep our buildings clean and safe.

Finally, our COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team will continue to monitor the implementation of our safety protocols, review our COVID data, and make recommendations if changes are needed. The Team will also be available to provide consultation to families and staff. As we did last year, we will provide a weekly COVID data dashboard on our school website.

As we implement all of the measures above, we will not be adhering to the strict physical distancing or cohorting that we did last year. Those two strategies required a different staffing model and use of space and significantly impacted our ability to offer lunch at all levels and programs such as our elementary specials. Our plan is to have students eat outdoors as much as possible and when eating inside try to space out to the extent feasible. Without strict physical distancing and cohorting in our tool box, our other mitigation measures become even more important.

With all of that said, let’s remember that we are in a better place than we were at this time last year! As we implemented our hybrid and remote models last fall, we were hopeful, but uncertain, about how all of our plans would work and how effective our health and safety measures would be. We learned a lot last year and have confidence in our ability to create a safe in-person learning environment. We look forward to a new year of busy and happy classrooms and schools!

Sincerely,



Emily Parks
Superintendent