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Superintendent



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Brendan Hoffman
Director of Student Services

To: Pelham School Board
From: Chip McGee, Superintendent
Re: Pandemic Response
Date: February 16, 2022
Cc: Deb Mahoney, Business Administrator
Sarah Marandos, Assistant Superintendent

This memo provides the Board and community an update on the District operations in light of the ongoing pandemic.

Key Takeaways

- The Pelham School District remains fully open to students.
- The level of community transmission remains **substantial** and has decreased significantly since January 19.
- The level of school impact is now **low**.
- Based on changes in the pandemic itself, our response, and current data, I recommend adjusting the Reopening Plan Decision Grid.
- If we make this change, starting tomorrow, masks and distancing would be optional throughout the District except for those wishing to return after only 5 days from isolation or quarantine and when riding a school bus.

Level of Community Transmission

The level of community transmission is **substantial** but has decreased significantly since the last update on January 19. In Pelham, there are 467 new infections per 100,000 in Pelham, which is substantial. This equates to 70 people out of the population in Pelham of 14,155. Pelham has a PCR test positivity rate of 4.8%, which is minimal. In Hillsborough County there are 474 new cases per 100,000 which is substantial and a PCR test positivity rate of 7.1% which is moderate.

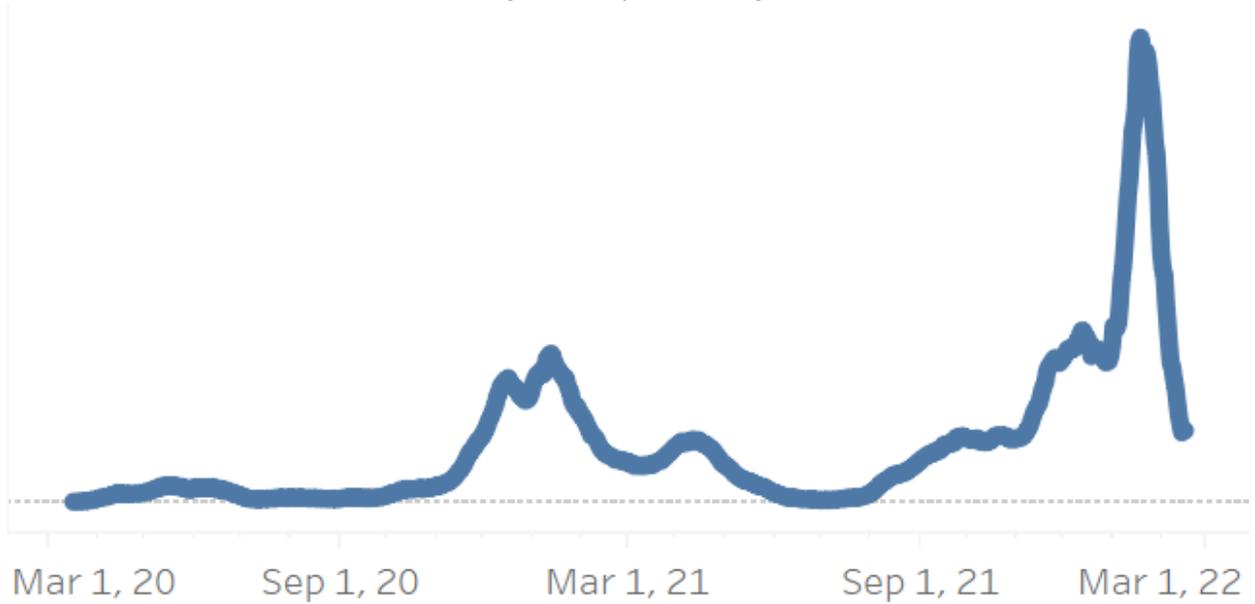
TABLE: Level of Community Transmission

Date	Pelham		Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua)	
	PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	New infections per 100k prior 14 days	PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	New infections per 100k prior 14 days
8.17	8.7%	276	6.3%	182
9.1	8.7%	473	6.5%	270
9.15	3.5%	579	4.4%	343
9.29	5.1%	643	4.2%	439
10.8	4.5%	692	4.0%	430
10.20	2.6%	431	6.1%	430
11.3	3.3%	311	7.2%	428
11.17	7.3%	523	10.1%	680
12.1	12.9%	1,046	12.7%	947
12.15	13.7%	1,109	11.3%	1,057
1.5	26.2%	1,250	21.5%	1,000
1.19	25.3%	4,225	23.3%	2,811
2.16	4.8%	467	7.1%	474

Minimal Moderate Substantial

NH DHHS trendlines for this data from the start of the pandemic provide a visual representation of the level of community transmission. The chart indicates a rapid decrease in community transmission since January 19. This data is for Hillsborough County excluding Nashua. Town-level trendlines are not provided by NH DHHS because of the lower population.

CHART: New Cases per 100,000 (last 14 days)
Hillsborough County excluding Nashua



Notes: This chart does not reconcile precisely to the table above because the chart is updated daily while the table is updated before each School Board meeting. The chart for PCR test positivity rate is not included because it was not updated by NH DHHS as of today.

Level of School Impact

The level of impact on the school is now **low**. It had been medium on January 19. This change is based on three criteria: transmission within the schools, student absenteeism, and staff capacity.

TABLE: Level of School Impact

Date	Transmission in schools	Student absenteeism	Staff capacity
8.17	Low	N/A	Normal
9.1	Low	4.6% - Low	Normal
9.15	Medium	7.5% - Low	Normal
9.29	Medium	9.0% - Low	Normal
10.8	Medium	8.5% - Low	Normal
10.20	Medium	5.4% - Low	Normal
11.3	Medium	5.4% - Low	Normal
11.17	Varied	9.0% - Low	Strained
12.1	Varied	9.6% - Low	Strained
12.15	Varied	7.8% - Low	Strained

1.5	Medium	20.0% - Medium	9.2%* - Strained
1.19	Varied	9.1% - Low	11.0%* - Strained
2.16	Low	5.0% - Low	6.7%* - Normal

Low Medium High

*Percent certified staff absent.

Source: Pelham School District data sources.

Transmission within the schools - All clusters at all three schools have ended. The number of students and staff who have tested positive has decreased dramatically. There are currently a total of three students and one staff member who are excluded as a result of testing positive. This means transmission within the schools is **low**.

All Known Positive Cases of COVID-19 for Students and Staff as of 2.16.22

School	Current			Total for 2021-22 (recovered and current)		
	Positive Cases		Clusters/ Outbreaks	Positive Cases		Clusters/ Outbreaks
	Students	Staff		Students	Staff	
Pelham Elementary School*	1	0	0/0	250	53	8/2
Pelham Memorial School	1	1	0/0	148	25	10/2
Pelham High School	1	0	0/0	170	14	5/1

Student absenteeism - Student absenteeism is at 5.0%. This is a decrease from January 19 when it was 9.1% and is considered **low**.

Staff capacity - Our staff attendance has continued to enable the District to operate in person. Today we had 6.7% of our certified educators absent. I cannot express fully my gratitude to all our staff for their continued effort throughout the nearly two years of pandemic response. Given low absenteeism and stabilized staffing levels, staff capacity is **low**.

Proposed Change to The Pelham School District 2021-22 Reopening Plan

The circumstances related to the pandemic have changed significantly since the reopening plan was written in July 2021.

- Vaccines: All students five years and older and all adults have had the opportunity to be vaccinated and to stay up to date with boosters. Up-to-date vaccinations significantly reduce the risk of death and hospitalization from the virus.
- Variants: The Omicron variant is less deadly and more contagious than previous variants.
- Negative Impacts: The pandemic has had a negative impact on students, staff, and families. This has been a national challenge. It has been caused by the anxiety of a deadly pandemic, the isolating nature of the pandemic including the need for masking and distancing, and the increased time out of school for students and staff.

As a result, I recommend that the reopening plan be adjusted to address these new circumstances. Specifically, I recommend that the decision grid be adjusted to allow for an "Emphasis on Pelham Data" when the Level of Community Transmission is "Substantial" and the Level of School Impact is "Low". I also recommend allowing for "No Masks No Distancing" when the Level of Community Transmission is "Moderate" and when the Level of School Impact is "Low". The changes would look like this:

Decision Grid		Level of Community Transmission ⁴		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Level of School Impact	Low	No Masks No Distancing	Emphasis on Pelham Data ⁶ No Masks No Distancing	Masks and Distancing Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶
	Medium	No Masks No Distancing ⁵	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Masks and Distancing
	High	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Primarily Remote	Primarily Remote

NEW Decision Grid

Provided the School Board approves the proposed adjustment to the Reopening Plan, the Decision Grid would work like this. While the level of community transmission is **substantial**, it is decreasing rapidly. The overall level of school impact is now **low**. The new decision grid (below) recommends **Emphasis on Pelham Data**.

Decision Grid		Level of Community Transmission ⁴		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Level of School Impact	Low	No Masks No Distancing	No Masks No Distancing	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶
	Medium	No Masks No Distancing ⁵	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Masks and Distancing
	High	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Primarily Remote	Primarily Remote

As a result, starting tomorrow we would make the following changes.

- Masks and distancing will be optional throughout the District.
- Staff and students wishing to return from isolation or quarantine after only 5 days will need to wear masks according to [NH DHHS Guidance](#).
- Students on the school buses will need to wear masks because of [federal regulations](#).
- PHS and PMS will post close contacts on [the Pelham School District pandemic response webpage](#) instead of sending out notices through email. PES moved to that system last week.

We will continue to monitor all variables in case further change is needed.

The Big Seven

We will continue to follow the universal guidance described in our Reopening 2021 Plan. Our mitigation measures are (1) face coverings, (2) distancing, (3) hand sanitation, (4) screening, (5) ventilation, (6) vaccines, and (7) testing. Although face coverings and distancing are optional, they remain on the list as potential tools for future challenges. Students and staff will still be required to self-screen and the District will continue its efforts related to providing additional ventilation, encouraging vaccines and providing optional testing.

Conclusion

We continue to adjust to the changing circumstances of the pandemic. The pandemic we face today is not the one that arrived in Pelham in March of 2020. I am hopeful that we are now in a position to manage the pandemic, rather than have it drive so much of what we do. It could be an opportunity to get to work on all the other challenges/opportunities we have in the Pelham School District. I want to thank staff, families, and students for their friendly, kind, and patient approach. If circumstances change further, we will adjust and persevere.

Metrics Scales- Reopening 2021

Criteria	Level of Community Transmission		
	Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
New - Town of Pelham - Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7 day average	<5%	5 - 10%	> 10%
New - Town of Pelham - New infections per 100,000 over the prior 14 days	<50	50 - 100	> 100
Hillsborough County Excluding Nashua - Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7 day average	<5%	5 - 10%	> 10%
Hillsborough County Excluding Nashua - New infections per 100,000 over the prior 14 days	<50	50 - 100	> 100

Criteria	Level of School Impact ¹		
	Low	Medium	High
Transmission within the schools	Zero or sporadic cases with no evidence of transmission within the schools	One cluster ² in the school	Two or more unrelated clusters ² in the school
Student absenteeism	<15%	15-30%	>30%
Staff capacity ³	Normal	Strained	Critical

Decision Grid		Level of Community Transmission ⁴		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Level of School Impact	Low	No Masks No Distancing	Emphasis on Pelham Data ⁶ No Masks No Distancing	Masks and Distancing Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶
	Medium	No Masks No Distancing ⁵	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Masks and Distancing
	High	Emphasis On Pelham Data ⁶	Primarily Remote	Primarily Remote

Notes:

- Level of School Impact is determined by the three identified criteria – transmission rate within the school, student absenteeism, and the staff's capacity to conduct classes and school operations.
- A cluster is defined as 3 or more individuals confirmed with COVID-19 who are part of a related group of individuals (e.g. a classroom) who had the potential to transmit infection to each other through close contact within the last 14 days. Two or more clusters are defined as those with onset (based on source case symptom onset dates) within 14 days of each other.
- Staff capacity includes a school's ability to maintain adequate staff for facility operations, transportation, teaching, and administrative functions.
- Level of Community Transmission is determined by PCR test positivity as a 7 day average and new infections over 14 days per 100,000 individuals. All are determined at the county level and not the community level since Pelham is relatively small and within Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua). The level of community transmission will not be a single determining decision-making variable. Rather, it will be used in conjunction with school impact and positive test rates.
- A medium level of school impact does not necessarily mean that masks and physical distancing are required. It depends on the type of school impact and will be determined by administration in conjunction with public health officers.
- "Emphasis on local data" means that decisions about increasing safety measures including masks and distancing will be based on Pelham data over county, state or national data.