

Eric "Chip" McGee, Ed.D.
Superintendent



Sarah Marandos, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent

Deb Mahoney
Business Administrator

Joan Cote
Director of Human Resources

Holly Doe
Director of Technology

59A Marsh Road
Pelham, NH 03076

T:(603)-635-1145
F:(603)-635-1283

Brendan Hoffman
Director of Student Services

To: Pelham School Board
From: Chip McGee, Superintendent
Re: Pandemic Response
Date: August 18, 2021
Cc: Deb Mahoney, Business Administrator
Sarah Marandos, Assistant Superintendent

This memo provides the Board and community an update on the District plans for reopening.

Key Takeaways

1. Unfortunately, **COVID-19 transmission** has increased in Pelham and is in the **substantial** range as of today.
2. Fortunately, we will be able to offer **free voluntary weekly PCR testing** for students and staff onsite at Pelham Elementary School. It will be on Wednesdays starting on September 8. This will add another layer of protection for our students and staff. In addition, we will continue to follow **the big six** of universal guidance described in our Reopening 2021 Plan. Our mitigation measures are (1) face coverings (see below), (2) distancing, (3) hand sanitation, (4) screening, (5) ventilation, and (6) vaccines.
3. As a result of takeaways 1 and 2, **anyone within three feet of another person for more than an incidental amount of time must wear a face covering** (for example group work, small group instruction, science labs, etc.). Otherwise, **face coverings are recommended though not required** (for example seated at an individual desk, working independently, passing in the halls, etc.). This applies to the whole district.
4. The Reopening 2021 Plan (approved July 7, 2021) needs two adjustments - (1) Federal rules require **face coverings on buses** and (2) we need to resume **contact tracing** so people can be notified if they may have been exposed.

COVID-19 Transmission

The Reopening 2021 Plan specified the use of more local data in decision making. The revised presentation is below for the level of community transmission and the level of school impact. [The final Pandemic Response Update memo from the 2020-21 school year dated June 16, 2021](#) is also available for reference.

Level of Community Transmission

The level of community transmission has increased since the last Board meeting. In Pelham it is now **substantial**. As of today, there are 276 new infections per 100,000 in Pelham. Pelham has a PCR test positivity rate of 8.7%. In Hillsborough County the level of community transmission is

also **substantial**. There are 182 new cases per 100,000 and a PCR test positivity rate of 6.3% In this case, we emphasize local data.

TABLE: Level of Community Transmission

Level	Criteria	08.17
Pelham	COVID-19 PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	8.7%
	New infections/ 100k prior 14 days	276
Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua)	COVID-19 PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	6.3%
	New infections/ 100k prior 14 days	182

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. This data is for Hillsborough County excluding Nashua. Town-level trendlines are not provided by NH DHHS because of the lower population. The charts show the increase in community transmission since July 7.

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

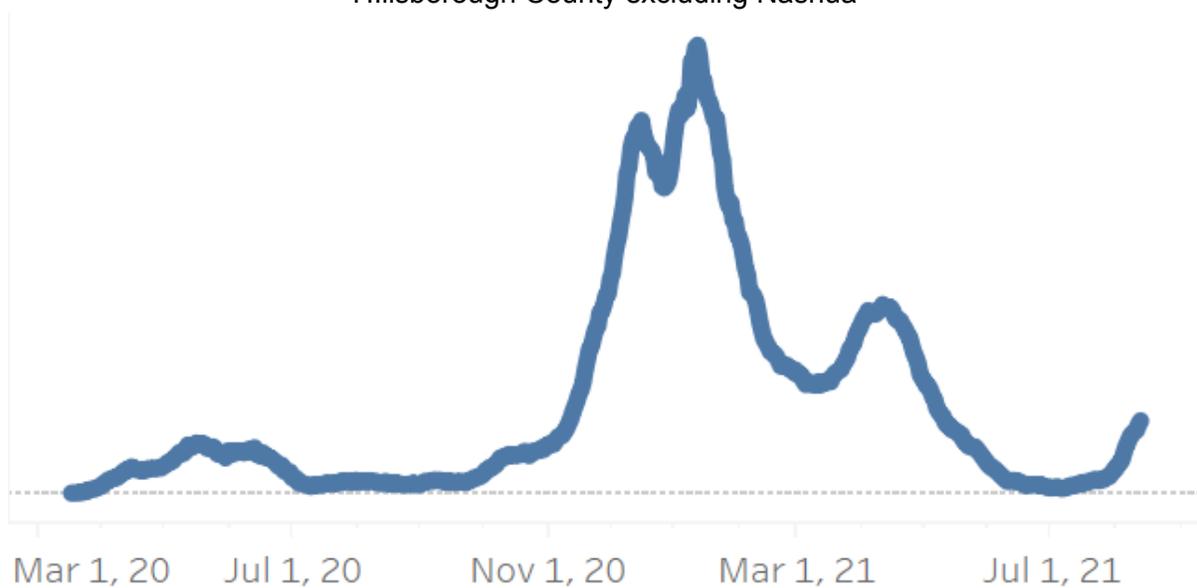
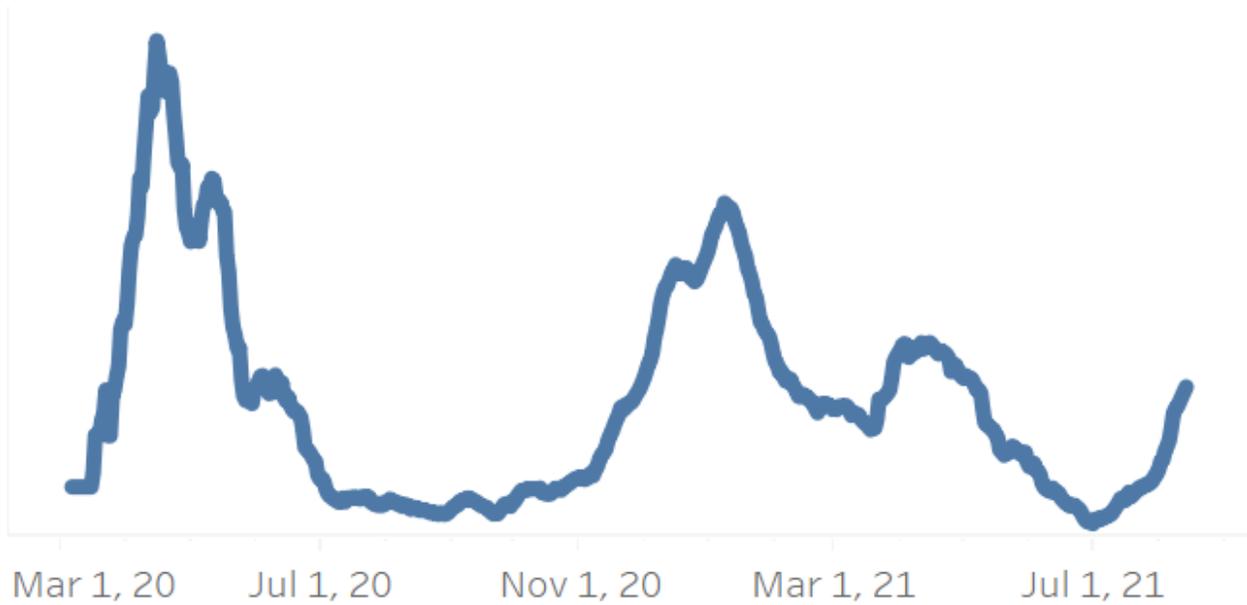


CHART: PCR Test Positivity Rate (last seven days)
Hillsborough County excluding Nashua



Notes: These charts do not reconcile precisely to the table above because the charts are updated daily while the table is updated before each School Board meeting.

Level of School Impact

The level of impact on the school is currently **low**. With few students in school during July and August, there have been no clusters. That means transmission in school is **low**. With so few students enrolled over the summer, there is no meaningful measurement of absenteeism. Although we continue to struggle to find sufficient staffing in all areas, the summer break has allowed the District to fill many positions. We will resume evaluating student absenteeism and staff capacity when the school year begins.

TABLE: Level of School Impact

Criteria	8.17
Transmission within schools	Low
Student absenteeism	N/A
Staff capacity ³	Normal

Low Medium High

Source: Pelham School District data sources.

With the level of community transmission at **substantial** and the level of school impact **low**, the decision grid suggests masks and distancing.

The Big Six (Plus One)

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, and (6) vaccines. Below are three critical details for Pelham regarding this universal guidance.

Vaccines

The most important action people can take to protect their health is to get the vaccine. Achieving a high level of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible children, students, staff, and families will help end this pandemic and end the need for mitigation measures. COVID-19 vaccination has been shown to be effective at preventing infection (see [CDC Science Brief](#)).

Onsite PCR Testing (the Plus One)

We will offer voluntary onsite PCR testing for students and staff this year. It is free to students and staff and the District. This will add another layer of protection and mitigation for our schools. It is possible through Federal funding and provided by Convenient MD. Our first priority is to test students who are younger than 12 because they are unable to be vaccinated and students engaged in interscholastic athletics because they are at higher risk due to their close interactions with students from other schools.

By the end of this week, families will be emailed access to the Convenient MD system to register for this testing. It is optional, and voluntary. It will be held at Pelham Elementary School on Wednesday afternoons. Families of students under 12 will have the option of having the testing done during the school day or returning after the school day ends. All other students and staff will be able to have the testing done after school.

Face Coverings

As a result of increased COVID-19 on one hand and PCR testing on the other, we will adjust our face covering guidance as follows:

- Anyone within three feet of another person for more than an incidental amount of time must wear a face covering.
 - For example, students or staff working together at a small table or with chairs close together must wear face coverings.
- Otherwise, face coverings are recommended, though not required.
 - Students seated at their individual desks will not be required to wear a mask. Also, students passing in the hallways would not be required to wear a mask because their time in contact with each other is short and NH DHHS has extended the length of time required to be considered a close contact to 15 minutes in any 24 hour period.
- Outside, face coverings are not required.
- We will use the cafeteria to serve lunch, where students need to remove their face covering to eat. As an extra step to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19, we will assign students to sit in “cohort” groups. The group and method will vary by school.
- We ask that all choices made by students and staff regarding facemasks be respected. This means be respectful of those who choose to wear a mask all the time and those who choose to remove it when it is not required.
- Students with documented health needs can request exceptions to these guidelines through the 504 process.

This decision is based on our decision grid (see last page) and the recommendation of the DHHS. According to the DHHS, universal face masks may not be necessary if a district can

provide a “robust asymptomatic screening testing program.” We can now provide such a program, which allows us to avoid universal face coverings at this time. As a result, students and staff can see each other’s faces during teaching and learning.

Changes to the Reopening 2021 Plan

Generally, the Reopening 2021 Plan remains in effect. These two changes are required.

- Buses
 - By [order of the CDC](#), “passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in CDC’s Order.” Pelham and our bus vendors agree that we will comply with this order.
 - This change is the result of greater clarity in working with our bus companies.
- Contact Tracing
 - In order to keep families and staff better informed, we will continue to provide notification to families if there is a chance they were exposed at school. If there is a confirmed positive case in school, we will notify those who may have been exposed. This will be done by email this year. Those possibly exposed will be told to [self-observe](#); they will no longer be excluded from school. After those people are contacted, an email message will go to the entire community. We will no longer be sending the names of close contacts to NH DHHS, as we did last year.
 - This change is the result of a recognized need for continued communication with the community on this issue.

Conclusion

These recommendations are based on the current local data regarding COVID-19 and the recommendations of the NH DHHS. If the level of community transmission changes or the level of school impact changes, we may need to adjust this plan. In order to make decisions about the need for these adjustments, the District will continue to consult with the COVID-19 Education Liaison at the NH DHHS and the Public Health Officer for the Town of Pelham.

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	Masks and Distancing
	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 is 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.