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Brendan Hoffman
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To: Pelham School Board
From: Chip McGee, Superintendent
Re: Pandemic Response
Date: October 6, 2021
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 free onsite asymptomatic PCR testing clinic is open to all who are interested, on a weekly basis and after school.
- The level of community transmission remains **substantial** and the level of school impact is now **medium**.
- Our current rule for face coverings is anyone within three feet of another person for more than an incidental amount of time must wear a mask. Otherwise, masks are recommended though not required. This applies to the whole district.
- As of September 10, Grade 8 downstairs has experienced a cluster. That cohort is required to wear masks and the end date of that requirement has been extended to the end of October 7.
- Starting tomorrow, I plan to adjust the community wide announcements regarding COVID-19 to be weekly on Thursdays. We will continue to notify close contacts as quickly as possible when we learn of a positive in the school.

Onsite PCR Testing

Our voluntary onsite PCR testing program for students and staff has completed 347 tests, all of which have returned negative. Signups are open again for students and staff on Wednesdays at PES.

- Afterschool: Students' families and staff who would like to sign up to come after school may complete [this consent form for Convenient MD](#) to authorize PCR testing. This can now be available on a weekly basis as a drop in clinic until 5:00 with no scheduled appointments.

- During School (PES Students Only): Students' families can sign their child up for testing during school. This is only for PES students. Testing during school will remain bi-weekly.

Testing remains free and adds another layer of protection and mitigation for our schools. It is possible through Federal funding and provided by Convenient MD.

Level of Community Transmission

The level of community transmission has continued to increase. In Pelham it has remained **substantial** because new infections per 100,000 are substantial and have increased again from two weeks ago. As of today, there are 692 new infections per 100,000 in Pelham, which equates to 98 people out of the population in Pelham of approximately 14,000. Pelham has a PCR test positivity rate of 4.5%, which is minimal. In Hillsborough County there are 430 new cases per 100,000 and a PCR test positivity rate of 4.0%. We have determined that this mix of data to be overall **substantial** is because the new cases measure current circumstances (who is positive and potentially contagious today) and test positivity is more forward-looking (who will be contagious for the coming 14 days).

TABLE: Level of Community Transmission

Level	Criteria	8.17	9.1	9.15	9.29	10.6
Pelham	COVID-19 PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	8.7%	8.7%	3.5%	5.1%	4.5%
	New infections / 100k prior 14 days	276	473	579	643	692
Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua)	COVID-19 PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	6.3%	6.5%	4.4%	4.2%	4.0%
	New infections/ 100k prior 14 days	182	270	343	439	430

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. In the charts, you can see the potentially hopeful trend of a decline in the test positivity rate. 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

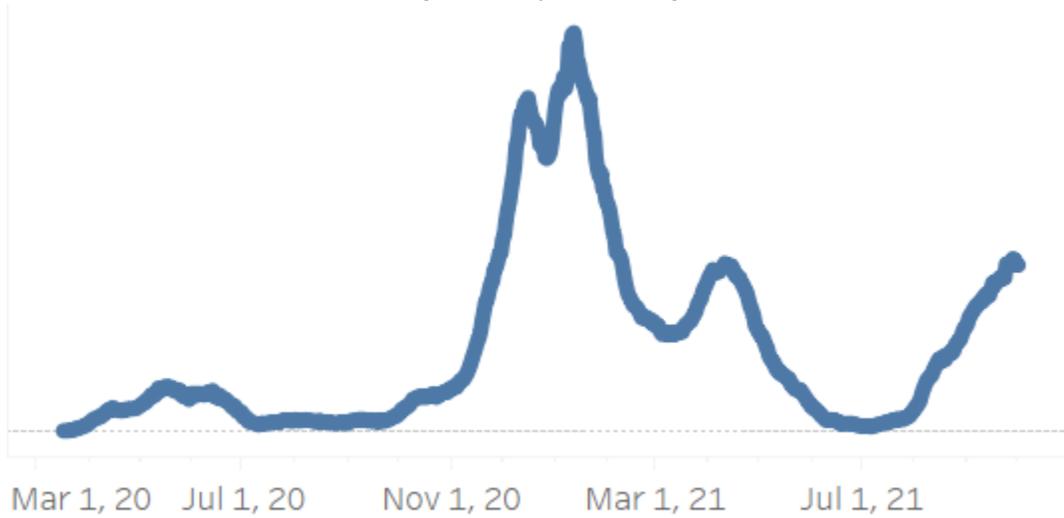


CHART: PCR Test Positivity Rate (last seven days)
Hillsborough County excluding Nashua



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 **medium**. We have five students and five staff at PES, one student at PMS and five students at PHS who are currently excluded from school for having tested positive for COVID-19. This data can also be found on the [Pelham School District COVID-19 Dashboard](#) and is updated every Wednesday.

All Known Positive Cases of COVID-19 for Students and Staff as of 10.6.21

School	Current			Total for 2021-22 (recovered and current)		
	Positive Cases		Clusters Outbreaks	Positive Cases		Clusters Outbreaks
	Students	Staff		Students	Staff	
Pelham Elementary School	5	5	0	32	7	0
Pelham Memorial School	1	0	1	22	1	1
Pelham High School	5	0	0	19	0	0

We have identified one cluster at PMS. Generally, a cluster is three or more people in a group (like a class or a team) who test positive within a set amount of time and no clear reason for why they did besides being the group. Despite additional positives including 5 staff members at PES, we have a steady number of people excluded. This is because those who test positive make it through their exclusion period and return to school. Student Absenteeism today is at 8.5%, which is **low**, but has increased since the start of the school year.. This was 142 students absent out of 1,679. We continue to struggle to find sufficient staffing given tight labor markets and exclusions. We do continue to look for instructional assistants and custodians. Nevertheless, our staffing capacity remains **normal**.

TABLE: Level of School Impact

Criteria	8.17	9.1	9.15	9.29	10.6
Transmission within schools	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Student absenteeism	N/A	4.6% Low	7.5% Low	9.0% Low	8.5% Low
Staff capacity ³	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal

Low Medium High

Source: Pelham School District data sources.

With the level of community transmission at **substantial** and the level of school impact **medium**, the decision grid recommends **masks and distancing**. This is why our current rule is anyone within three feet of another person for more than an incidental amount of time must wear a mask. Otherwise, masks are recommended though not required This applies to the whole district. It is also why we have increased expectations for masking in the eighth grade downstairs team, which has been extended until the end of October 7.

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

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.

Communication Change

Starting tomorrow, I plan to adjust our approach to the community wide announcement about COVID-19 in schools. The messages, which I title "Important Announcements regarding COVID-19," will move to weekly sent on Thursdays. This change is happening for two reasons. First, the volume of communication families can be overwhelming especially when those potentially exposed could get two or even three messages about the same event. Second, the information on the [Pelham School District COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#) will also be updated weekly on Wednesdays and provides a more consistently available source of data for the community. We will continue to notify potential close contacts as quickly as possible when we learn of a positive case in the school.

Conclusion

Our approach continues to be 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.