

To: Pelham School Board
From: Chip McGee, Superintendent
Re: Pandemic Response
Date: December 7, 2020
Cc: Deb Mahoney, Business Administrator
Sarah Marandos, Director of Curriculum

I am recommending to the Pelham School Board that the Pelham School District remain in a remote status until at least January 4 in order to maintain our student and staff health and safety during the pandemic. I further recommend scheduling a special meeting for December 28 or thereabout to make a decision regarding January 4 and beyond.

Process

This recommendation is based on the current level of community transmission and the level of school impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation was developed with input from staff and parents. The final choice is based, ultimately, on the leadership team's interpretation of the metrics used to evaluate the impact of the pandemic.

Key Implications

If the Board accepts this recommendation, there will be a set of implications for the community.

- These implications are the same as for the current pivot.
 - School buildings and the SAU offices remain open throughout this time period and are following the same universal guidelines for staff and students using the school.
 - Preschool will be in session during the pivot.
 - We will continue to provide in-school special education services on a case by case basis.
- These are new implications.
 - In order to ensure consistent expectations, staff members are to come to work unless they have an approved leave or an approved exception starting on Dec 14.
 - Principal Van Vracken and her team are investigating holding Kindergarten in school sessions during the pivot.
 - The Family Choice decisions for the Second Semester for the high school will continue as planned. The survey will be distributed on December 11 and is due back on Dec 18.
 - Principal Mead and our Athletic Director Todd Kress are developing a response for athletics in line with the District recommendations this evening.

Further explanation and support for families and staff will be shared over the course of this week.

Level of Community Transmission

The Level of Community Transmission is one of the key metrics the district used to make this recommendation. The average test positivity rate has increased from 3.8% to 7.7% from November 18 to Dec 7. This is considered moderate spread. The number of new infections per

100,000 for the past 14 days has increased from 240.4 to 508.4, which is considered substantial. The rate of hospitalizations has dropped from 1.4 to 0.5 during this time, which is considered minimal.

Level of Community Transmission

Criteria	Nov 18, 2020	Dec 1, 2020	Dec 7, 2020
Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7 day average	3.8% Minimal	4.8% Minimal	7.7% Moderate
Number of new infections per 100,000 population prior 14 days	240.4 Substantial	441.6 Substantial	508.4 Substantial
Number of new hospitalizations per 100,000 people over the prior 14 days	1.4 Minimal	1.4 Minimal	0.5 Minimal

The overall Level of Community Transmission is considered substantial by [New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 Schools Dashboard](#). This data is for Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua). Additionally, the [Harvard Global Health Institute's COVID Risk Level Map and COVID Suppression Guidance](#) indicates that New Hampshire is at a "tipping point." This data is for the second congressional district of New Hampshire.

Level of School Impact

The level of impact on the school is more difficult to evaluate as of December 7 because most students are attending school remotely. It is not meaningful to evaluate transmission in the school when students are not in school. Additionally, student absenteeism from in school instruction is not measurable. While we take attendance for our remote classes, it is not an indicator of the safety of having students attend in school classes.

In order to get a sense of the impact on students and staff, we have provided a Staffing Capacity Data table to review the number of exclusions year to date and currently. An exclusion means a case where a person is told to not come to school for reasons related to COVID-19. This could be a positive test, a secondary exposure, or symptoms. Not shown are staff who require leaves of absence for their own long term health care, the care of children whose school is affected by COVID-19, and non-COVID-related challenges.

Staffing Capacity Data

School	Enrollment as of 10/1	Exclusions				Positive Cases since Pivot on 11/25	
		Year to Date		As of 12/7			
		Student	Staff	Student	Staff	Student	Staff
PES	711	247	62	18	8	2	4
PMS/SAU	433	161	60	13	7	4	3
PHS	606	218	33	22	6	2	0
Total	1,750	626	155	53	21	8	7

We have had 8 positive students and 7 positive staff since we pivoted. Because students were not in school, we avoided significant additional close contacts and exclusions. For example, one of those staff members likely would have led to 21 student exclusions, three classroom teacher exclusions and one special education exclusion if we had been in school this week. As another example, we experienced a single positive case of a staff member in our food service program last night. That one positive case caused us to exclude 10 of 14 staff members. As a result of this single incident, we will not be able to prepare and delivery our 1,600 meals for Wednesday.

Level of School Impact

Criteria	Nov 18, 2020	Dec 1, 2020	Dec 7, 2020
Transmission within the schools	Low	N/A	N/A
Student absenteeism	5% Low	N/A	N/A
Staff capacity ³	Strained Medium	Strained Medium	Strained Medium

Source: Pelham School District data sources.

Conclusion

This has been a difficult decision for the leadership team for two main reasons. First, the middle school and high school could likely be open for in school instruction if we looked only at staffing levels. Our staff, teachers, instructional assistants, custodians, nurses, support staff, and administration have worked incredibly hard to remain open. However, the challenge we face to operate safely is now a combination of staffing and community transmission. Second, we are recommending staff work from school unless they have a leave or exception in place starting on December 14. This is because this will be a more consistent and equitable approach across the staff throughout the district. In a time of rapidly changing expectations, it will provide the consistency staff have asked for. It will also provide greater coverage for those students who are still in school. We are confident that this can be done safely for staff. Ultimately, we are confident that this overall recommendation puts safety first and provides as much in school instruction as possible.

Metrics Scales

Criteria	Level of Community Transmission		
	Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7 day average	<5%	5 - 10%	> 10%
Number of new infections per 100,000 people over the prior 14 days	<50	50 - 100	>100
Number of new hospitalizations per 100,000 people over the prior 14 days	<10	10 - 20	>20

Criteria	Level of School Impact		
	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		
		Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Level of School Impact	Low	Family Choice	Family Choice	Family Choice ⁵
	Medium	Family Choice	Family Choice ⁵	Primarily Remote
	High	Primarily Remote ⁴	Primarily Remote	Primarily Remote

Notes:

Thank you to Salem School District for sharing their materials.

1. 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. Capacity to maintain operations is a subjective factor.
2. 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.
3. Staff capacity is a subjective assessment. Account must be taken for a school’s ability to maintain adequate staff for facility operations, transportation, teaching, and administrative functions.
4. Rate of community transmission with a high impact on schools will very likely be determined by local public health officials in conjunction with school officials. High impact on schools is defined as greater than 30% student absenteeism and critical effect on school operations.
5. Level of Community Transmission is determined by PCR test positivity as a 7 day average, new infections over 14 days per 100,000 individuals, and new hospitalizations. All are determined at the county level and not the community level. Consequently, the rate of community transmission determined with input and guidance from local or state public health officials. The level of community transmission likely will not be a single determining decision-making variable. Rather, it will be used in conjunction with school impact and positive test rates.