



Reopening 2021

Pelham School District Plan for Reopening Schools

July 7, 2021

Contact Information:

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Recommendations

This Reopening 2021 Plan was developed with feedback from our Reopening 2021 Task Force, that included parents, teachers, students and administrators. This group came to consensus on this reopening plan as presented to the Board. The key elements of the plan for reopening the Pelham School District in the fall of 2021 are as follows:

- Our goal is to have a school year as close to normal as possible.
- Face coverings will be optional.
- Physical distancing will not be required.
- Many activities will return to a pre-pandemic approach. For example, we anticipate having regular capacity on buses, regular use of lockers for students, and regular meals in the cafeteria.
- Everyone who enters our building will be required to self screen.
- People with COVID-19 will be excluded from school.
- We will continue following hand sanitation, cleaning, and ventilation guidelines.

We are making these plans because of the continued decrease in community transmission of COVID-19 and the increasing number of people who have been vaccinated. This guidance assumes that the level of community transmission will be minimal and the level of school impact will be low by the start of the school year and would be adjusted if the pandemic returns. Additional details are included in the plan below.

Communication

Accurate and timely information delivered to students, families and educators will allow the district to manage expectations, prepare students and families with return-to-school procedures and prevent the spread of inaccurate information. These principles will guide our approach to communication.

- The Superintendent will serve as the primary point of contact for communications related to the pandemic response.
- Communication about any person confirmed to have COVID-19 while at the school will follow the same protocol as was used in 2020-21. This means that if the student or staff member is determined to have COVID-19, the Superintendent will notify the entire District community through an email. We will continue to find the necessary balance between privacy and safety in these efforts.

As a next step, we are planning a public forum via ZOOM for July 14. Although we could hold this session in person, we are using ZOOM to increase access for families.

Process

The Reopening 2021 Plan is based on the Reopening Plan for 2020. The key concepts were reviewed by the Pelham School District Reopening 2021 Task Force. The Task Force included teachers, other professional staff, parents, students, administrators and a School Board member. The Task Force did its work based on the following principles.

- Safety First – The health and safety of our students, faculty, and community is our highest priority. This includes addressing our students’ social and emotional well being.
- Be in School - While our remote learning efforts have been remarkable this past year, it is not equivalent to, or a replacement for, in-person teaching and learning. Students deserve the best education we can provide so long as it is safe to do so.
- Data Drives our Decisions - Reopening decisions will be based on epidemiological data and guided by Public Health Officials and Emergency Management partners.
- Be Flexible; Offer Choice - As circumstances continue to change, District decisions will need to be flexible. Flexibility includes potential differences depending on students' ages and needs.
- Be Equitable and Personalized - Reopening must support educational equity for all of our students and the personalization of learning for all students.
- Focus on Pelham - Information and Decision Making needs to start at the local level. (Note: This principle was developed by the task force during the meetings).

The facilitators of the Task Force worked with staff to address more detailed logistical, legal and operational questions. We used the guidance developed over the past year from the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) as well as information from the New Hampshire Department of Education (NH DOE), Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The Task Force came to consensus in support of this reopening plan as presented to the Board.

The plan will continue to require adjustment over time as new information about public health conditions becomes available. This includes the possibility of loosening or tightening the guidelines if warranted.

Background

The Pelham School District operated under the Family Choice model for the 2020-21 school year with approximately 75% of our students in school full-time and 25% remote full-time. From November 30 to January 19, the District was fully remote during a peak time of the pandemic. During the year, the District used the NH DHHS model to inform our decisions about when to make transitions from one type of instruction to another. The model is called “[Considerations for Transitioning Between School Instructional Models Based on Level of Community COVID-19 Transmission and Impact on Local Schools Updated: January 26, 2021](#)”. The two primary criteria recommended by the NH DHHS to determine whether to adjust our approach have been the level of community transmission and the level of school impact.

Level of Community Transmission

The level of community transmission was measured with two indicators, the COVID-19 PCR test positivity rate and the new infections per 100,000 population in the prior 14 days. In both cases, we tracked these indicators for Hillsborough County excluding Nashua. The District reported this data to the School Board and community at Board Meetings from November 18, 2020 through June 16, 2021.

TABLE: Level of Community Transmission (2020-21)

Criteria	11.18	12.1	12.7	12.15	12.28	1.6	1.20	2.17	3.3	3.17	4.07	4.21	5.5	5.19	6.2	6.16
COVID-19 PCR test positivity % 7-day avg	3.8	4.8	7.7	9.8	8.3	11.1	8.7	4.6	4.2	3.7	6.2	5.2	3.4	3.2	2.2	1.4
New infections/ 100k prior 14 days	240	442	508	787	613	739	769	315	274	267	417	395	242	137	66	27

Minimal Moderate Substantial

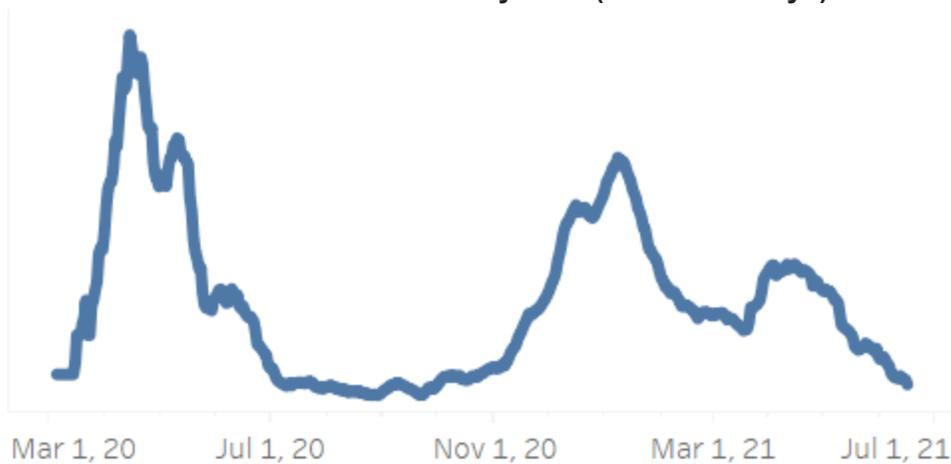
The table shows how community transmission peaked around January 8 and again around April 7. The level of community transmission was minimal, indicated in green, for the first time for both indicators on June 16, 2021.

NH DHHS produces trendlines for this data from the start of the pandemic. The trendlines provide a visual representation of the level of community transmission.

CHART: New Cases per 100,000 (last 14 days)



CHART: PCR Test Positivity Rate (last seven days)



The charts and tables show the surges in March 2020, January of 2021 and April 2021.

Level of School Impact

The level of school impact is measured by three indicators: transmission in schools, student absenteeism, and staff capacity. Over the course of the school year, NH DHHS never identified sufficient evidence to conclude we had any transmission with the schools. Throughout the year, attendance was high so absenteeism was low. Staffing capacity remained strained throughout the year; however, the reason behind it changed. During the height of the surge, staffing of our custodians and instructional assistants (IAs) positions continue to present our most significant challenge. The signing bonus and recruitment bonus for custodians, contracted services, and the vaccination clinic for staff also appears to have helped stabilize staffing levels.

TABLE: Level of School Impact

Criteria	11.18	12.1	12.7	12.16	12.28	1.6	1.20	2.1	3.3	3.17	4.7	4.21	5.5	5.19	6.2	6.16
Transmission within schools	Low	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Low									
Student absenteeism	5% Low	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5% Low	7% Low	6% Low	6% Low	9% Low	6% Low	6% Low	4% Low	6% Low	6% Low
Staff capacity ³	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain	Strain

Low Medium High

Source: Pelham School District data sources.

Our community faced a truly unprecedented disruption since March of 2020, a change that also affected the rest of New Hampshire, our nation, and the world. Pelham, in particular, can take pride in our resilience, adaptability, and commitment to providing families with the choice to be in school or remote for the better part of the school year. Families and staff adjusted quickly to the need to pivot to remote during the surge. Throughout this entire time, students, staff and families were challenged by the disruption to their routines and to their most basic social interactions. This forms a backdrop for the work in Pelham to reopen our schools.

Health and Safety Plan

First and foremost, the Pelham response will address the health and safety of our students and staff. We are planning on a school year as close to normal as possible. We can plan on this because of the continued decrease in community transmission of COVID-19 and the increasing number of people who have been vaccinated. This guidance assumes that the level of community transmission will be minimal and the level of school impact will be low by the start of the school year. (see the Appendix: Metrics Scales for the specific definitions).

As a result, we will have these guidelines in place for health and safety at the start of the school year.

- Face coverings will be optional.
- Distancing guidelines will not be required.
- Screening/exclusions will be required
- Hand sanitation will be required.

- We will continue to provide community wide updates for exposures in school through email as it has been done in 2020-21.

As a result, this will return many school functions to a more normal pre-COVID approach. This includes:

- Regular capacity on buses.
- Regular use of lockers for students.
- Regular meals in the cafeteria.
- Regular movement of students to different classes.
- Group work in classrooms.
- Shared supplies as needed.

Limits on COVID-19 Vaccination Requirements

The NH DOE has provided [this guidance](#) regarding vaccination and school reopening plans for the 2021-2022 school year. The NH DOE “acknowledges that some operational modifications may continue to be a necessary” and that “the 2021-22 school year will almost certainly open with a COVID-19 vaccine(s) available to some portion of New Hampshire school-aged children.” As a result, they have shared two important positions that the Pelham School District has also adopted for 2021-22.

- The Pelham School District will not require COVID-19 vaccination for attendance for the 2021-22 school year.
- The Pelham School District will not “tether” vaccinations to mask wearing. In other words, students who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine will not be required to wear a mask when vaccinated students are not required to do so. Also, students who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine will not be required to occupy different physical spaces than vaccinated students.

Self Screening

In order to help ensure it is safe and healthy for everyone to enter our schools, everyone who enters our building must self screen. These will be the self screening questions.

1. Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
2. Have you had a fever or felt feverish in the last 72 hours?
3. Are you experiencing any respiratory symptoms including a runny nose, sore throat, cough, or shortness of breath?
4. Are you experiencing any new muscle aches or chills?
5. Have you experienced any new change in your sense of taste or smell?
6. Is your temperature at or above 100.0 Fahrenheit?

If a person answers no to all of these questions, they may enter.

For students, we ask that parents screen their children before coming to school. Generally, we expect everyone to measure their temperature at home before coming to school. We will continue to have instant read thermometers available for those who request it.

If they answer yes to any one question above, that person cannot come into the school at that time. Students will be asked to wait in the school nurse’s designated space until we can make arrangements to have them picked up. Employees will be asked to return home and contact

their supervisor. Visitors will be asked to return when they are able or consider how to conduct their business without entering the school.

Students and staff who are screened out will be allowed to return to school according to NH DHHS Guidelines.

One challenge that needs additional planning is the anticipated cold and flu season. We recognize that we will have many students with a common cold or flu that presents like COVID-19. We will have the problem of false positives, in which students might be excluded unnecessarily. We may also have the problem of false negatives, in which we do not exclude students or staff who do have COVID-19.

Hand Sanitation

Staff and students will continue to incorporate multiple daily hand washing routines whenever possible or use hand sanitizer.

Possible COVID Cases

We recognize there may continue to be times when someone shows symptoms of a possible COVID case while at school. In such a case, we will follow these steps:

1. We will immediately refer them to the school nurse.
2. The school nurse will keep them in the separate COVID-related area until they can go home.
3. They will be directed to see their healthcare provider and to self-isolate at home.
4. If the person is determined to have COVID-19, the Superintendent will inform the entire District community through an email.
5. Students will have access to their work through Google Classroom and other platforms as available.

The school nurse will no longer report cases and school administration will no longer complete contact tracing. Close contacts in school will no longer be excluded from coming physically in person to school. These changes are based on the updated [this Self Observation Guide from NH DHHS](#).

We will continue to find the necessary balance between privacy and safety in these efforts. We also recognize that circumstances can vary significantly, and we will strive to keep the unique and individualized needs of staff and students in mind.

Staff Options

The vast majority of students will be in school next year. As a result, with rare exception all staff assignments will be in school as well. We recognize that some staff members may be unable to perform their assigned duties as a result of circumstances related to COVID-19. Just as we do for any relevant medical issues, the District will follow the same process available to all employees related to the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable laws.

Operations

Much of our continued response to this pandemic is operational, including facilities and transportation. We have identified the following operational issues that need to be addressed to reopen safely.

- Cleaning
 - Custodial staff will regularly clean the schools and workspaces including high-touch surfaces regularly according to NH DHHS guidelines.
 - Custodial staff will regularly use an ultraviolet light surface sanitizing process.
 - Classrooms will have access to sanitizing wipes.
- Food Service
 - Lunch will be provided in the cafeterias.
 - Breakfast will be offered again.
 - We will no longer offer a remote meals program.
- Transportation
 - Buses will be allowed to have full capacity and masks will not be required on buses to start the year.
 - Families will be required to self screen including taking temperature prior to getting on the school bus.
- Ventilation
 - We have purchased additional portable HEPA air purification equipment to cover anticipated additional student-staff instructional spaces reopening in the fall.
 - We will implement measures to improve indoor air quality that include:
 - adjustments to ventilation air flow,
 - use of portable HEPA air purification equipment, and
 - use of open windows and fans to support increased airflow.
 - The School Board has committed to installing AC on the second floor and in the cafeteria at PES providing the availability of Federal Funds. This project is expected to be operational in June 2022.
 - Additionally, we will make sure that the systems are balanced, working, and that they are reviewed by a HVAC professional.
- Other
 - We will leave bubblers off until such time as national standards in this area change.
 - We will allow the use of lockers.
 - We will no longer require one way directions in hallways and stairs.
 - We will purchase sufficient cleaning supplies and hand washing and sanitizing supplies for staff and student use.
 - We will reopen school facilities to visitors and outside group use/rent, nights, weekends and school breaks as we did pre-pandemic.
 - We will request consideration of overnight trips as before the pandemic.

We have set aside federal funds earmarked for the pandemic response to fund these needs for 2021-22.

Teaching and Learning

Generally, we will have in-school instruction for the vast majority of students. This includes students changing classrooms as was done prior to the pandemic.

Technology

Teachers will continue to provide, distribute, and collect materials through Google Classroom (or a similar system). We will not offer long-term multi-platform instruction, because it remains difficult to engage students both remote and in-school simultaneously and effectively. One or the other approach remains superior for both groups.

If possible, we would prefer to be able to provide the technology short-term if a student needs to be excluded from school. We will explore using this on a very limited basis. We would also need to provide professional development to teachers on how to use the equipment, so an excluded student could “stream in.”

Remote Option

The New Hampshire Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) will be our primary option for remote learners. A designated staff member at each school will facilitate finding options using VLACS and other resources for families who choose this option for the year. We do not know how many students will actually choose VLACS as a remote option. Additionally, the high school administration team will need to make clear how the school will handle VLACS courses for GPA calculations in the program of studies. We will need to explain this option clearly to parents considering this option. We should also communicate to parents about the partnership and offer support during the summer.

“Learning Loss”

First and foremost, we want to recognize that our students learned a great deal in the past 18 months, both academically and in terms of their own resilience. Nevertheless, we need to address gaps with instruction for those students who need it. We have already implemented summer programming on a voluntary basis. We will commit to after-school support for students who need additional instructional time as a result of pandemic impacts starting in the fall. This will include a late bus.

Other Changes

Some changes are specific to the age level of the students affected.

Pelham Elementary School

- Kindergarten and Preschool will return to their pre-pandemic schedules.
- Grades 1 through 5 will have access to 1:1 computing in school. Grade 1 - 3 will keep the devices at school. Grade 4 will be able to send them home. Grade 5 will have them stay with the student.

- Unified Arts, including music, art, physical education, library, and STEM, will return to pre-pandemic programming with students traveling to those classes.

Pelham Memorial School

- Programming will run as normal with our health and safety guidelines in place.
- Terms will remain on a trimester schedule for both core classes and unified arts.
- Unified Arts will return to pre-pandemic programming with students traveling to those classes.

Pelham High School

- For the 2021-22 school year, we will continue to use a 4 x 4 block schedule. This will reduce the impact in the unlikely event of another pivot to remote.

Social-Emotional Impacts

The pandemic and the required protocols implemented within the school community while necessary for a safe reopening had a significant impact on students and staff overall social and emotional health and wellness. The social-emotional impacts of the pandemic and time away from school will be first and foremost as a concern when we re-engage students. This is true for those students who were in-school and for those that were remote. We have focussed on programming that is evidence-based, readily available, and familiar. We will continue our commitment to a [researched-based program](#), namely the [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning's \(CASEL's\) Three Signature Practices](#).

Although our teachers may feel pressure to move academically, we will be reopening schools in a new normal. This means re-establishing routines, reviewing new safety precautions and rebuilding connections between students and staff. The concern about the social-emotional impact of the pandemic extends also to our staff. Pelham School District educators of all types have worked very hard and have been asked to do things very differently on short notice. As we plan reopening, we must keep in mind their needs, personal and professional. Parents, as well, have been through a great deal. The most important work we can do for parents is to safely and quickly return their children to school.

To alleviate student and staff anxiety, we will pay special attention to the transition back to school. This includes:

- Dedicating time to community-building activities within the school. This will include activities designed to establish authentic, healthy and supportive relationships between teachers and students. Although each building will be given the latitude to develop these activities independently, they will be provided resources such as CASEL's 3 signature practices playbook to support the systemic implementation of social-emotional learning.
- Providing staff with professional development on self-care and anxiety management as well as frequent reminders of the Employee Assistance program resources that are available to them.
- Creating clear pathways of communication to individuals who can answer parents' questions related to community-based resources, mental health concerns, or educational needs (both academic and social-emotional).

- Providing time for staff to collaborate with their colleagues in order to ensure that they have a social network to support them.
- Encouraging the development of community-building activities for staff as well as students.
- Expanding after-school options including a late bus for students who need to catch up with academics.

For students, staff, and families, we will seek to lower the tensions and anxiety around potential comments of “mask shaming” or “vaccination shaming.” Significantly, this can happen for those who are wearing masks and those who are not wearing masks. It can happen for those who are vaccinated or those who are not vaccinated. We have found that students, staff, and families may feel differently about the pandemic and the school’s response. Sometimes, students, staff and families may feel anxious about these changes. We will need to have a way of establishing expectations of respectful dialogue and an open, clear, and safe process to discuss differences of opinion.

We will continue to approach social-emotional learning on three levels, or “tiers.” The overall system is known as a Multi-Tiered System of Support for Behavior ([MTSS-B](#)).

- Universal Interventions (Tier 1)
 - Identifying the time and space necessary to focus on social-emotional learning instruction and activities.
 - Teaching classroom social-emotional learning instruction at least 1 time per week for the first 6 weeks of school. These lessons will be driven by an evidence-based curriculum that aligns with the CASEL framework.
 - Offering the opportunity for students to participate in universal screening for social-emotional wellness and offer opportunities for interventions designed to meet their unique needs.
 - Providing resources to the larger school community regarding social-emotional health and wellness that teachers, students, and families can utilize.
- Targeted Interventions (Tier 2) - Small group targeted interventions will be designed to meet the needs of students for whom the universal interventions are not sufficient. These interventions may include (but are not limited to):
 - Positive Behavior Support Plans
 - Small Group Counseling utilizing evidence based interventions such as Coping Cat or Second Step.
 - Check In/Check Out
- Intensive Interventions (Tier 3) - These more intensive interventions are designed to meet the needs of students who require individualized interventions. These interventions may include (but are not limited to):
 - Individual Counseling
 - Referrals to Community Mental Health or other providers

Staff will need professional development and appropriate teaching resources to enable the successful implementation of social-emotional learning in the upcoming year.

Future Decision Making

The plan will continue to require thoughtful and deliberate adjustments over time as new information about public health conditions becomes available. These adjustments must ultimately be made at the local level and with careful deliberations to avoid significant disruptions to the lives of families and staff. Day to day operational decisions will ultimately be made by the Superintendent. The School Board always retains broad oversight and can review any decision.

We will continue to track the level of community transmission and the level of school impact. We will add to our analysis Pelham specific data as well as continuing to report data from Hillsborough County (excluding Nashua). We will monitor updates from NH DHHS, NH DOE and the CDC, with a continued commitment to have the NH DHHS guidelines be the primary guide.

As long as the level of community transmission remains minimal and the level of school impact is not significant, we will follow this plan. If the level of community transmission increases or the level of school impact increases, we will need to adjust this plan as needed. In order to make decisions about the need for these adjustments, the District will consult with the COVID-19 Education Liaison at the NH DHHS and the Public Health Officer for the Town of Pelham.

Minimal community transmission is defined as the Covid-19 PCR test positivity as a 7 day average for the Town of Pelham being less than 5% and the number of new infections per 100,000 people over the prior 14 days for the Town of Pelham being fewer than 50.

If NH DHHS changes its guidance, we will review our approach as well, and, if appropriate, change as well.

Metrics Scales

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	Masks and Distancing	Primarily Remote	Primarily Remote

Notes:

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.
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 includes a school’s ability to maintain adequate staff for facility operations, transportation, teaching, and administrative functions.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. “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.

Appendix: Task Force Purpose and Membership

Purpose: To provide regular feedback from a range of representative perspectives on the Pelham School District Reopening Plans. The Task Force cannot override the guidance of federal, state, or local public health officials or education officials including the Pelham School Board.

Subcommittees

- Teaching and Learning
 - Assistant Superintendent Sarah Marandos
 - Parent Iris O'Donnell PMS
 - Parent Christina Tetreault - PHS
 - Student Shaelyn Bonaparte, Class of 2022
 - Teacher Tracy Hussey PES
 - Principal Stacy Maghakian PMS
- Health and Safety
 - Director of Human Resources Joan Cote
 - Parent Ralph Cantacesso - PHS
 - Parent Joshua Glynn - PES
 - Student Madison Gillis, Class of 2023
 - School Nurse Assistant Nicole MacKinnon
 - Pelham School Board Member Megan Larson
 - Parent Lisa Celata - PMS
 - Superintendent Chip McGee (float)
- Operations
 - Business Administrator Deb Mahoney
 - Parent Ronald Campbell - PES
 - Teacher Nisha Padhye, PHS
 - Instructional Assistant Donna Dailey
 - Principal Jessica VanVranken PES
 - Director of Technology Lee Depres
- Social-emotional Impacts
 - Director of Special Services Brendan Hoffman
 - Parent Laurie White - PES
 - Teacher Lisa Stevens PMS
 - Instructional Coach Patti Lamontagne
 - Principal Dawn Mead PHS
 - Student Shaelyn Bonaparte Class of 2022

Appendix: Guiding Documents

For 2021-22, NH DHHS has organized resources for schools under a single website, <https://www.covid19.nh.gov/resources/schools>.

In 2020-21, we used the following resources to develop the 2020-21 plan.

- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Guidance for School Reentry](#)
- [CDC Preparing K-12 School Administrators for a Safe Return to School in Fall 2020 - July 23, 2020](#)
- [Massachusetts Initial Return to School Guidance - June 25, 2020](#)
- [New Hampshire Grade K - 12 Back to School Guidance](#)
- [New Hampshire Reopening Guidance \(General\)](#) (Link no longer available)
- [NEA-NH Principles for Reopening](#)