Initial Fall Reopening Guidance

A planning resource to ensure a safe return to school for the 2020-21 school year

June 25, 2020
DESE is grateful for the continued engagement of multiple stakeholders from the education and medical communities whose perspectives have shaped our guidance.

**Health experts and medical community**
- COVID-19 Command Center Medical Advisory Board
- Dr. Sandra Nelson, MD, Infectious Disease, Massachusetts General Hospital
- Dr. Lloyd Fisher, incoming President, Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

**Return-to-School Working Group**
45-member group consisting of students, parents, teachers, superintendents and school administrators, leaders from educational non-profit organizations, and municipal officials

**Collaboration with key stakeholders**
Superintendents, administrators, parents, experts in public health and teaching and learning, teachers’ unions
DESE is asking districts to prioritize the safe return of students to in-person school settings to maximize learning and address students’ holistic needs.

**Initial Fall Memo**

DESE’s initial fall memo is intended to help districts achieve the goal of safe, in-person student learning and includes the following:

**Health & Safety Requirements**
for in-person learning this fall

**Reopening Plans**
to address three possible learning models

**Upcoming DESE Guidance**
to support fall planning
Our philosophy and approach balances COVID-19 related health and safety risks with risks of keeping students out of school

| Our goal is the **safe return of as many students as possible to in-person school settings**, to maximize learning and address our students’ holistic needs | Our initial fall guidance is based on an extensive review of current medical literature | Our guidance attempts to **balance the health and safety risks of COVID-19 with the health, safety, socioeconomic, and achievement risks** of keeping students out of school | It is not one mitigation strategy but a **combination of mitigation strategies taken together** that will substantially reduce the risk of transmission |
Getting students and educators back to school in-person, safely, relies on a combination of strategies, including key health and safety measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masks/ face coverings</td>
<td>Primary route of transmission for COVID-19 is respiratory. <strong>Masks/ face coverings protect against COVID-19 infection</strong> (study estimates 80% effectiveness in reducing transmission(^1))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distancing</td>
<td>Physical distancing helps mitigate virus transmission. Aim for six feet between individuals when feasible; <strong>a minimum physical distance of three feet is appropriate as informed by evidence when combined with the other measures outlined in the list of safety requirements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing / hand sanitizing</td>
<td>Handwashing removes pathogens from the hands. While <strong>handwashing with soap and water is the best option</strong>, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol) may be utilized when handwashing is not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying home when sick</td>
<td><strong>Students and educators should stay home if they are sick</strong> or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19</td>
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1. https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/5/5/e002794.full.pdf
Review of medical literature suggests that children are less susceptible to and less likely to transmit COVID-19

Schools do not appear to have played a major role in COVID-19 transmission

- In a review of COVID clusters, only ~4% (8 of 210) involved school transmission\(^1\)

In general, rates of COVID-19 infection are lower for children than for adults

- Based on an analysis of data from six countries, children under 20 are half as susceptible to COVID-19 infection than adults\(^2\)

If exposed, children may be less likely to become infected with COVID-19

- In China, in households with COVID-19 exposure, children under the age of 18 were infected at a rate of 4% compared with 17% for adults.\(^3\)

If infected, children may be less likely to infect others with COVID-19

- In Switzerland, a study of household clusters found that only 8% had a child as the index case. In nearly 80% of the cases, the child got COVID-19 from an adult family member.\(^4\)

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1 Leclerc, Q. J., Fuller, N. M., Knight, L. E., Funk, S., Knight, G. M., & CMMID COVID-19 Working Group. (2020). What settings have been linked to SARS-CoV-2 transmission clusters? Wellcome Open Research, 5(83), 83. Available at https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/5-83/v2
Each district and school needs to plan for three possibilities on the continuum of reopening:

1. **In-person learning with new safety requirements**
   - Students learn in-person with new safety requirements.
   - Our goal for fall: to get as many students as possible back into schools for in-person learning – safely.

2. **Hybrid learning**
   - Students learn both in-person and remote.
   - Available in the event districts/schools are unable to bring all students back to school despite best efforts, or in case of COVID-19 related circumstances.

3. **Remote learning**
   - Learning takes place remotely.
   - Available for individual students who cannot yet return in-person and for all students in the event of future closures due to COVID-19.

Across all three models all districts and schools need a plan for how special populations will receive necessary services and accommodations.
Districts and schools will be required to submit their comprehensive fall reopening plans (all three models) to DESE in August.

DESE will provide more guidance to districts shortly.
To facilitate planning, DESE is working on additional, comprehensive guidance for districts on the following topics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health &amp; Safety Requirements</th>
<th>Reopening Plans</th>
<th>Upcoming DESE Guidance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Key policies, including academic calendar considerations</td>
<td>Prerequisites for in-person reopening</td>
<td>Remote learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process for handling a COVID-19 positive case in the school community</td>
<td><strong>Comprehensive guidance coming in July</strong></td>
<td>Special programs and populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and operations</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Athletics, extracurriculars, and electives</td>
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