

Expanding In-Person Learning: Meeting DESE's Revised Regulations for Structured Learning Time

Community Forum Presentation - March 15 & 16, 2021





Agenda

1. Guiding Principles
2. Commissioner Guidance
3. Summary of In-Person Expansion Plan
4. Operations and Staffing
5. Professional Development Plan
6. Community Forums and Parent Orientation
7. Next Steps





Guiding Principles

*** Information from School Reopening Plan*

1. Our decisions will be guided by the latest health data and input from public health experts. We will continue to monitor the rate of positive cases here in Lowell and statewide.
2. We will maximize options for families and offer a in-person learning option, as well as an remote option.
3. We make a commitment to equity, with the belief that a public education is a fundamental civil right. Families and students who have historically been underserved have had a voice in the planning process and will have their needs met.





DESE Commissioner's Guidance (*as of 3/9/21*)

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner, Jeffrey Riley, released new guidance on March 9, 2021 containing requirements for structured learning time and in-person learning. The following passages are contained within the guidance documents:

- *These regulations are legally binding. Any district that does not comply with the regulatory requirements or receive a waiver by April 5, 2021 (for the elementary school phase of the plan) will be required to make up any missed structured learning time. This time could be made up during this school year, over the summer, or into next school year if necessary. In addition, G.L. c. 71, § 4A links Chapter 70 funds to structured learning time (DESE Guidance, p.1).*
- *Because the regulations have the force of law, once the Commissioner makes the determination that hybrid and remote learning will no longer count towards structured learning time, a school committee vote on which learning model to adopt is not necessary because full-time, in-person learning will be the default required model. Remote learning should be provided only if parents/guardians opt out of in-person learning for the remainder of this school year and for students who must remain home due to a COVID-19 related issue (DESE Guidance, p.7).*



DESE Commissioner's Guidance (*as of 3/9/21*)

While continuing to allow all families the option of full-time remote learning, the Commissioner of DESE released the following timeline for returning students to full-time in-person learning:

- ***Elementary school phase (grades K-5):*** Districts and schools are required to shift their learning model for elementary school grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week effective **Monday, April 5, 2021**.
- ***Middle school phase (grades 6-8):*** Districts and schools will be required to shift their learning model for middle school grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week, effective **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**. Districts may choose to ask students who have traveled to a state on the restricted list to learn remotely for the week of April 26, 2021 (the week after April vacation).
- ***High school phase (grades 9-12):*** We will announce the details and timing of the high school phase of the plan in April. Districts will be provided with at least two weeks advance notice of the specific date requirement for high school students but should start making such plans now (DESE Guidance, p.5).



Summary of LPS In-Person Expansion Plan

The significant prior planning in anticipation of an April expansion of in-person learning as adopted by the School Committee on February 22 has positioned LPS well for the implementation of the DESE regulations for structured learning time, with a few adjustments at each grade span as noted below. Based on feedback from multiple stakeholders, pending Committee approval, our local timeline for expanding in-person learning will shift to a phased approach:



- **April 5th** - 5 days per week in-person instructional model for elementary school students with a parental option of full remote.
- **April 5th** - Grade 5 students will return to middle schools for 5 day per week in-person instruction with a parental option of full remote.
- **April 26th** - 5 days per week in-person instructional model for middle school students in grades 6-8 with a parental option of full remote.
- **April 26th** - Hybrid model at LHS with lunch time dismissal.



Preschool

Preschool students assigned to the Cardinal O'Connell Early Learning Center who are currently remote learners may return to in-person instruction starting April 5. Remote preschool students at all other schools will remain in remote learning for the time being. After grades K-5 return to in-person learning on April 5, LPS will reassess school facilities to determine if preschool in-person learning may occur at other schools in addition to the Cardinal.





Summary of LPS In-Person Expansion Plan

Families should have completed a return to school survey last month. If a family selects to continue remote learning for the student, and then decides to change to in-person learning, please contact the school principal. If a family selected in-person learning on the survey, someone from the school should have reached out to you. If you have not heard, please contact the school.

Below is the timeline for families who select remote learning to change to in-person instruction.

- **May 3rd** - Date families may select in-person from remote learning for grades K-5
- **May 24th**- Date families may select in-person from remote learning for grades 6-12
- **May 24th**- Date families may select in-person from remote learning for grades k-5



High School Scheduling Considerations

- Various college/career pathways with specific electives
- Wide variation in student schedules, (early college, AP, college prep, ELL, SWDs, repeater sections) especially in grades 10-12
- Dual enrollment/advanced courses
- Latin Lyceum
- Teacher certifications

High school scheduling is unique and has multiple variables that must be carefully weighed within the context of the COVID models.





Operations - Social Distancing

Guidance on In-Person Learning and Student Learning Time Requirements (March 9, 2021, Page 3)

“Since June 2020, DESE guidance has consistently noted that three feet in classrooms is a safe standard for physical distancing when masks are worn and other mitigation strategies are in place based on guidelines from WHO and American Academy of Pediatrics.?”

“...While districts should space students further than three feet when feasible, evidence demonstrates that the additional risk reduction associated with six feet as opposed to three feet is low – when masks are worn and other and other mitigation strategies are in place.”

DESE’s approach to physical distancing was endorsed last summer by the Governor’s COVID Command Medical Advisory board, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and medical experts from Mass General Brigham.

Numerous studies endorse that there are no significant increases in risk when masks are worn by both parties when spaced 1, 3, and 6 feet apart.



Operations - Pool Testing

- Pool testing will continue to make our schools safer
- The Commonwealth is paying for testing until April vacation, after which the School Committee plans to fund continued pool testing.
- Consent is needed
(Consent form located on the LPS website:
<https://www.lowell.k12.ma.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=4570>)
- As of last Monday, throughout Commonwealth, it was reported that 99.66% (1441) of pooled tests in the DESE program have been negative!! (positivity rate is only 0.34% (5). Will report new data as received.





Operations - Facility Improvements

- City reported this month in joint facilities meeting in early March that 87% of exhaust, ventilation, and fresh air intakes were now working.
- Have an Air Purifier for each classroom
- Received 50 additional purifiers from DESE; Ordered 100 additional backup purifiers
- Scheduled replacement of filters in purifiers
- Space will be increased with use of interior classrooms on/after April 5, 2021 with air purifiers.





Operations - Cafeteria

- Challenges with maintaining social distancing when eating (as temporarily maskless); likely will need to be 6-feet apart. Will have classroom eating, outside eating, or eating in small groups to abide by 6ft
- LHS would be dismissed prior to lunch and students would receive meals to take with them.
- School Committee authorized a new position to assist with meal delivery to students in classrooms and for cleaning.
- Two cafeterias will be reopened per week so that all elementary cafeterias are open on April 5 (next slide)





Operations - Cafeteria Openings

Currently open	Schedule for remainder of openings for K-8 kitchens.
<p>Kitchens:</p> <p>Elementary open:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pyne Arts · McAvinnue · Morey School · Lincoln School · STEM Academy <p>Middle/High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · LHS production · Butler School · Wang School · Robinson School 	<p>Kitchens:</p> <p>Opening 3/15/2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bartlett Community Partnership · Greenhalge Elementary School · Murkland Elementary School <p>Opening 3/22/2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pawtucketville Elementary · Reilly Elementary · McAuliffe Elementary <p>Opening 3/29/2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Shaughnessy Elementary School · Bailey Elementary School





Operations - Transportation

Current Policy

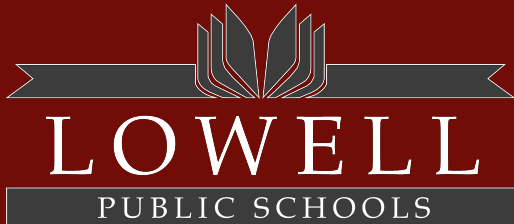
- Transportation for Grades 1-6 for students who live 2+ miles away
- 35 buses operational now

Challenges

- More students need access to transportation to access in-person learning

Constraints

- Per DESE 11FEB21 memo, can fit up to 77 students on a bus
- Risk to classrooms from quarantining; drivers and monitors would have contact with many more students
- Unavailability of drivers





Operations - HR Challenges

- Streaming in of instruction from teachers in the highest tier of risk who elect to teach remotely.

Potential Impact: Students may be in-person but may have a remote teacher with paraprofessional assisting in classroom.

- Staff who still do not feel they can work in schools will be allowed to take an unpaid leave of absence and return for the 2021-2022 school year. Those leaves should be applied for by March 22, 2021. May have some new teachers.

Potential impact: Student may have new teacher.





Operations - Vaccines

CircleHealth offered a two day event where 350 Lowell School personnel, who had two comorbidities, received a vaccine.

Approximately 200 first vaccines were secured at the Lowell Sr. Center for educators who are Lowell residents for March 15-18.

On Friday, March 12, 2021, the Commonwealth launched a pre-registration system for mass vaccination sites. This tool will be available at mass.gov/COVIDvaccine. Pre-registration will allow eligible residents to book an appointment at one of the state's 7 mass vaccination sites.

The Commonwealth's 7 mass vaccination sites will only offer 1st dose appointments for K-12 employees on March 27, April 3, April 10, and April 11.





Professional Development

- The Office of Teaching and Learning will be offering all school-based staff, assigned to a classroom that requires concurrent/simultaneous teaching, professional development in the instructional model.
- 6 hours of professional development will be available to all staff members prior to April 5th to support staff in navigating the concurrent/simultaneous instructional model.





Challenges and Opportunities of Full In-Person Instructional Model for Phase 2

	Opportunities	Challenges
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full use of instructional strategies and techniques ● Valid and reliable data collection ● Materials are fully available ● Closer connection between staff and students ● More traditional class sizes ● Students SEL needs may be addressed ● Expansive use of technology to incorporate into our regular practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scheduling students to minimize the need to travel between classes/buildings ● Maintaining mitigation strategies (wearing masks, hand sanitizing, and social distancing) ● Classroom rosters ● Safely providing breakfast and lunch to students ● Implementing concurrent, effective strategies with students ● Ongoing PD for staff ● <i>High school rostering and staff constraints may limit the viability of increased full in-person seats at Lowell High School as it could cause significant disruption to student course schedules and could jeopardize pathways to graduation</i>



Challenges and Opportunities of Full In-Person Instructional Model for Phase 2

	Opportunities	Challenges
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to typical operational structures (rosters, class assignments, schedules) Cleaning Schedules Teachers have adapted and are successful with remote learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social distancing standards (i.e. 6 feet) will likely need to be re-assessed due to space constraints in some schools and/or classrooms Transportation Using rooms without windows with air purifiers Social distancing requirements for meals and breaks
Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance Meals are more easily available Engage in remote/virtual - can be flexible with times and ways to connect Students in buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orienting families to health protocols Two-way communication regarding health Providing family choice for instructional models Transportation Building new routines



Family Information Sessions

- Virtual information sessions provided by Central Office leadership updating families on the expansion of in-person learning in April
 - Monday, March 15 at 5pm
 - Tuesday, March 16 at 3pm
 - Tuesday, March 16 at 5pm (Spanish language session)
- Small group multilingual sessions (Khmer, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili) provided by Bilingual Family Liaisons from March 17-19
- Schools are asked to schedule school-based orientations between March 17-26



LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SY2020-2021 PHASED EXPANSION OF SAFE IN-PERSON LEARNING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

BEGAN SEPTEMBER 17; SCALED BACK DUE TO SURGING COVID-19 DATA ON OCTOBER 19

PHASE 1

PARTIAL RETURN TO PHASE 1 BEGAN ON FEBRUARY 22; FULL RETURN TO PHASE 1 ON MARCH 1

ONGOING PREPARATION & READINESS

- *Nov. 2020* - SURVEY FAMILIES
- *Ongoing* - UPDATE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT POLICY
- *Feb. 2021* - UPDATE CLASS ROSTERS

- RETURN TO ORIGINAL RE-OPENING MODEL AS PER SC VOTE
- UP TO 25% FULL-TIME IN-PERSON LEARNERS, 75% FULL-TIME REMOTE
- PRIORITIZED IN-PERSON ENROLLMENT FOR MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS, GRADES PK-12
- MAINTAIN ROSTERING CONTINUITY FOR LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL (~10% IN-PERSON)

PHASE 2

WILL BEGIN ON APRIL 5th FOLLOWING THE TIMELINE ESTABLISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

PLANNING AND DESIGN

- *2/3 - 2/23* - SURVEY FAMILIES
- *3/3 TO 3/17* - SC APPROVAL OF ADDENDUM TO DISTRICT REOPENING PLAN
- *2/17 - 3/15* - UPDATE CLASS ROSTERS AND FINALIZE SCHOOL-BASED PLANS
- *3/1 - 3/22* - FINALIZE BUS ROUTES AND STAFFING
- *3/20 - 3/25* - PROVIDE PD ON CONCURRENT TEACHING

- TWO COHORTS OF IN-PERSON LEARNERS PLUS REMOTE OPTION
 - MAINTAIN PHASE 1 (25% FULL-TIME IN-PERSON COHORT FOR PK-12)
 - APRIL 5TH FULL IN-PERSON OPTION FOR ELEMENTARY (PK-5) STUDENTS OF THE 75% WHO HAVE BEEN FULLY REMOTE SINCE SEPT. 17TH.
 - MAINTAIN FULL-TIME REMOTE OPTION FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS

PHASE 3

WILL BEGIN ON APRIL 26th FOLLOWING THE TIMELINE ESTABLISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

PLANNING AND DESIGN

- *2/17 - 3/15* UPDATE CLASS ROSTERS AND LEVEL CLASS SIZES
- RECONFIGURE CLASSROOM SPACES BASED ON UPDATED GUIDANCE
- *3/1 - 3/22* REVISE TRANSPORTATION POLICY AND BUS ROUTES
- *2/17 - 3/15* FINALIZE SCHOOL-BASED PLANS AND STAFFING ASSIGNMENTS

- UP TO 100% OF GRADES PK-12 PROVIDED WITH ACCESS TO FULL-TIME IN-PERSON LEARNING
 - APRIL 26TH FULL IN-PERSON OPTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL (6-8) STUDENTS OF THE 75% WHO HAVE BEEN FULLY REMOTE SINCE SEPT. 17TH.
 - APRIL 26TH - LHS HYBRID MODEL
 - MAINTAIN FULL-TIME REMOTE OPTION FOR ALL GRADES



Next Steps

The following key dates and deliverables in March will be important for the School Committee to keep in mind as we continue to support the readiness of families, staff and school buildings for the transition to expanded in-person learning in April:

- March 15th and 16th: Districtwide virtual community forums
- March 17th to 26th: School-based virtual information and orientation sessions for families
- March 20th to 25th: Professional development for teachers and instructional support staff
- March 10th to 29th: Schools finalize school-based reopening plans; confirming student return, adjusting/fine-tuning master schedules, and reviewing and adjusting class rosters as needed
- *April 5th: First day of expanded in-person learning for grades K to 5*
- *April 26th: First day of expanded in-person learning for grades 6-8*
- *April 26th: LHS hybrid instructional model begins*

