

## CESD / COVID-19 FAQ

Frequently asked questions from April 6, District Committee Planning Meeting

Q: There are explicit travel guidelines to follow. People will test themselves if they travel so why do we expect and increase in cases?

A: I was asked to report out data regarding our cases following vacations. Out of 15 letters that went to parents reporting COVID cases, 2 each happened during the two weeks after the Thanksgiving, Winter, and February breaks. This is not enough data to be significant, however it does indicate a pattern. Concerns regarding the dates of roll-ins also include staff vaccinations and as there are only 2 days of school between the April 13 decision by the School Board and the April 26 return to school date, it is not enough to finalize plans.

Q: “You just said you would be hiring full time subs thought, right? Isn’t that going to take care of increased supervision around lunch?”

A: The comment of full time subs was made in regards to providing allied arts experiences for remote learners at the middle school if allied arts teachers are unable to provide instruction for those students.

Q: Can you ask parents and community members to volunteer for lunch monitoring duty?

A: We tried this 2 years ago and had very little response. Those who did volunteer could only do so sporadically. 25 minutes of uninterrupted lunch is a condition of collective bargaining agreements and this time must be guaranteed each day. While we have an active volunteer system, it has not worked out for lunch monitoring in the past.

Q: Why are you talking of measuring from desk to desk?

A: If you watch the [recording of the April 6, 2021 meeting](#) or view the [materials](#) from the meeting, available on the website you will see that while some of the photos show only 2 feet between desks, where the students are actually sitting allows 3 feet between bodies of those smaller students.

These questions were posted during and right after the March 30 District Planning Committee. The answers reflect guidelines garnered from data as of April 1, 2021, and may change due to more updated information. Please note the dates on previous answers, as changes may have occurred.

Q: Are these CDC guidelines binding? Does this mean that because Cumberland County switches back and forth between “high” and “substantial” in positivity rates, this committee will NOT advocate for in person full time return of middle and high school students?

A: We have been directed to follow the Maine CDC metrics for determining risk designations, as these metrics take into consideration factors that are specific to Maine. Following is the message from Kelli Deveaux, Director of Communications, Maine Department of Education on Monday, March 29, 2021.

“To answer your questions on state versus federal metrics for determining risk designations, I have confirmed this with Maine CDC.

In the absence of federal guidance, Maine developed its own county-level risk assessment systems to be used with the COVID-19 safety framework that was implemented at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year. This system, in conjunction with the health and safety requirements, have demonstrated success; week after week the new case rates in schools remain lower than that of the general population. As you know, the federal guidance and designation system was announced in February, at which time Maine had 6 months of data from the use of their own metrics. We’ve seen no data or analysis to indicate that the broader federal system would improve upon the one Maine has had in place for more than half a year. “

Q: Will all teachers be vaccinated by the end of April?

A: Vaccination is a voluntary and confidential action, and we can only collect data from those that voluntarily provide it. In a recent survey, 88% of those teachers who responded, said that they planned to be fully vaccinated by the end of April.

Q: What are we going to do after the summer break? Push the start date out an extra two weeks in the fall? Kids are not going to stay inside or away from their friends during that time.

A: The calendar for the 2021-2022 school year that was approved by the School Board identifies September 1, 2020 as the first day of school for Cape Elizabeth students.

Questions and Answers from Attendees at District Planning Meeting: March 16, 2021

Q: Have you reached out to Ruth's Reusables for desks?

A: **March 18, 2021:** Yes, they are researching this request and will get back to us.

Q: Question: If we return to 5 days a week and a student in our classroom contracts Covid and was present in school, all the other students will have to be quarantined but a vaccinated teacher will not?

A: **March 18, 2021:** Correct - if a fully vaccinated staff member (one who has completed their vaccine series plus the additional 14 days post vaccine to develop immunity) shows proof of vaccinations to one of the building school nurses, that staff member would not have to quarantine. Any students (or other staff members who are not vaccinated) who were in the classroom would be required to quarantine.

Q: Could you have the students wash their own desks on the way out?

A: **March 18, 2021:** This might be a possibility, perhaps having students spray desks and then teachers wiping them down to save on paper waste. We will discuss this further.

Q: Are Pond Cove classrooms mostly single desks?

A: **March 18, 2021:** At this time every Pond Cove Classroom is set up with up to 11 single desks. This is necessary in order to space each student at 6 feet. In order to set every classroom with 18-21 desks at 3 foot distancing, we will need to acquire about 275 additional desks. This is because most of our classrooms contained tables in previous years.

Q: Was the MA study that shows no difference between 8 ft. and 3 ft. shared with staff?

CDC Misinterpreted Our Research

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/09/cdc-school-opening-covid-rules-guidance-column/4628552001/>

A: **March 18, 2021:** We have created a folder for articles related to returning students to school buildings. This article will be included with other information and is available for everyone on our district website under the *Coronavirus and School Reopening Information* button.

Q: Will we be able to make decisions before the next meeting in two weeks?

A: **March 18, 2021:** Administrators will continue to research the details. This information may eliminate options, however the information will be presented to the District Planning Committee who will make the recommendation/s to the School Board. The School Board will make the final decision, so no, no final option decisions will be made in the next two weeks. Administrators may make decisions on the details needed as we move forward. EX: When will we move furniture? What

furniture will we need to order? Who will clean the furniture? There are many details to work out to determine feasibility of the options, and influencing factors may change as we move through this process. The Committee will not slow down the progress of the decisions. More important information will be shared at each meeting as we research the impacting factors. It is imperative that the Committee collect the necessary information before making a recommendation.

Comment: Parents could monitor lunches at Pond Cove.

A: **March 18, 2021:** This might be a possibility if they could commit to several hours per day in order to have consistent adults in the lunchroom for our students, and to eliminate possible COVID exposure by having many different people in our lunchrooms. Currently we are not admitting volunteers into our buildings when students are present. We did ask for volunteers at the beginning of the year last year and were unsuccessful in finding people who could volunteer several hours a day on a consistent schedule.

**Q: How do the latest changes in COVID-19 vaccinations impact our teachers?**

A: **March 4, 2021:** Governor Mills has issued a [directive](#) to align Maine’s vaccination plan to make all school staff and childcare providers eligible for Covid-19 vaccinations. The latest update on vaccinations in Maine has changed the system to one based on age, with teachers receiving priority within their age groups, ([Link to MDOE update](#)) however, on March 2, President Biden ordered states to have all teachers receive the first vaccination by the end of March. The state is currently developing a process for teacher registration for the vaccine.

**Q: If social distancing/spacing is the issue, why not use other spaces in the schools and town, like town hall and TML?**

A: **March 4, 2021:** We are currently researching the use of portables, tents, and commercial buildings within a 30-mile radius. Data will be analyzed for feasibility in areas such as: financial, student safety, staffing, special education support, etc.

Our school gyms are already being used for these purposes – extra learning spaces and eating spaces. TML is not open to the public, and town hall is only open in a limited capacity. Neither are viable options. However, if we could find double the classroom space somehow, we would also have to hire certified teachers to teach the children in those spaces. That is not a financially viable option.

**Q: If our county is designated “green”, why are we in a hybrid system?**

A: We are a public school and have to follow the Maine Department of Education rules and Maine CDC guidelines. A “green” designation means schools may open for full in-person learning **IF** all DOE COVID-19 standards can be met. Those standards include universal masking, a certain standard of ventilation, and social distancing of *at least* 3 feet apart among children in most situations, *at least* 6 feet apart when eating or drinking, and *at least* 6 feet apart among adults. ([link to DOE info](#)) Our buildings do not allow us to meet those standards.

MDOE guidelines also include providing proper ventilation. We are using a federal grant to fund ventilation projects in our schools that began mid-February. Completion of these projects in late March will provide proper ventilation for our schools. Prior to the completion of these projects, ventilation standards prohibit full classes of students in our classrooms and hallways during the pandemic. Planning for ventilation projects has required submitting an application to the state for approval, securing equipment during a limited supply (due to the pandemic) situation, contracting with a company to complete the work, and creating a schedule during the school year that impacts student learning as little as possible.

**Q: It seems like young (K-4) students would especially benefit from more in-person learning and may transmit COVID at a reduced rate. Have we considered different approaches for the different schools?**

A: We have studied the possibility of providing elementary students with ½ days a week for four days a week, however, with a limited number of bus drivers and buses, the transportation schedule would actually reduce the amount of time that elementary students are in school. The principals and school nurses have measured and assessed each classroom for spacing possibilities. Our classrooms do not have the space that would be required to accommodate full classes with the required 3 feet of social distancing. Principals have also investigated the use of other spaces in the buildings. Currently most students at Pond Cove and CEMS are eating lunch in the cafeteria. The gym at CEMS is also being used for grades 7 and 8 student lunches. Physical education classes are still being held in the gym at Pond Cove (in compliance with MDOE guidelines) , so that space is not available for classrooms. Fire codes prohibit holding classes in hallways. All spaces have been investigated and analyzed for use throughout this school year.

**Q: Why are some schools in Maine, and other states, able to go in person full time, while other schools are hybrid or remote?**

A: Each state governs their own school systems. In Maine, public schools must abide by the rules of the Department of Education. Each school system in Maine is different, with different buildings (age, quality, structure, layout), student population, etc. Our aging buildings with small classrooms and narrow hallways are holding us back. The PC/MS cafetorium is a major barrier. We are on track to improve ventilation at all three schools this winter and spring, as that has also been an issue.

**Q: After the plans were made over the summer and the school year started, have administrators, nurses, and teachers been on autopilot with no review or changes to the system?**

A: There is no auto pilot during this pandemic. Teams are regularly reviewing every part of the current system and making changes as necessary. Quarantining that involves staff has required a great amount of time, looking at each situation and the implications separately, always creating plans that allow students to be in our buildings as much time as possible. This work was evident in our creative 2-wave transportation schedule that was used when transportation staff was impacted, and our creative solution to providing students with lunches during our renovation challenges. Both of these plans were shared with parents in communications from the Superintendent. Scheduling options are continually being discussed and reviewed, with creative ideas for roadblocks being investigated.

**Q: If COVID-19 rates are going down steadily and transmission is very low in schools, why can't we get all our kids back into school full time, in person?**

A: The Maine DOE requirements have not changed. The DOE requirements are likely the reason transmission is very low in our schools. When those requirements change, we are ready to respond.

**Q: Are our schools prepared to have students back full time, in person, at any point this year if the DOE requirements change?**

A: Yes, should MDOE requirements change so that we could have our students safely back in school full time, we would be ready and happy to change back to a normal schedule.

**Q: I heard the President of the United States say he hopes all students K-8 can get back to school, all the time, in person, in April. Is that going to happen in Cape?**

A: We all hope that we can get our students back to school full time as soon as possible. The [New York Times](#) reported that the President was referring to beginning in-person teaching “at least one day a week” in April. Many schools in the country have been “shuttered” (closed full time), and references to opening schools are referring to allowing students to return in various hybrid models. Through much planning by school administrators and staff our schools have remained opened for the majority of the time throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

**Q: I'm worried about learning gaps. What are the schools doing about that?**

A: Teachers and administrators are regularly assessing students and looking carefully at that data. Extra staffing has been put into next year's budget proposal to address these needs and support students. ([link to SB presentation by Cathy and principals](#))

**Q: My kids are suffering from all this social isolation, loss of time with family and friends, missing traditions and activities. Are the schools thinking about the mental health of students?**

A: Yes! Social workers, and guidance counselors have continued to work with students, both in person and remotely throughout the pandemic. Parents who have concerns specific to their students, and who would like to request additional help should contact their Principals.

**Q: Are our school and district leaders working on plans for next school year? What do those plans look like?**

A: Yes! Our District and School 2021-2022 calendar has been prepared based on plans for students to return to school full time at the start of the school year. Ventilation projects are in progress to ensure proper ventilation in our schools in order to accommodate full classrooms of students. Return to school full time, at any time would be dependent on a change in MDOE guidelines for social distancing.

**Q: I'd like to give input about fall 2021. How do I do that?**

A: We are planning to have students return to school full time at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, dependent on MDOE requirements. Input can be provided to Principals or to the Superintendent of Schools.

**Q: Why is it important for school staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in relation to more in-person learning?**

A: We believe our educators and support staff, who work with children and other adults every day, should be given the high priority for vaccination that matches the great value of their work.

**Q: It seems like CESD's major barrier to getting all students back into school full time are the MDOE's physical distancing requirements. What studies and steps are being taken to meet the 3 foot distancing requirement for classrooms and hallways, but keep the 6 foot distancing standard for eating? What if the MDOE eliminates the 3 foot distancing requirement for classrooms and hallways, but keeps the 6 foot distancing requirement for eating?**

A: Principals have recently re-measured their classrooms to see if we can accommodate more students and still follow social distancing requirements. Adding more students to our rooms would make us out of compliance with the social distancing requirements. 6 foot distancing for eating continues to be a challenge in Pond Cove and CEMS where we share a cafeteria and/or where students eat in their classrooms.

With the expectation of additional federal funding from Covid Relief, we are currently exploring facilities such as area churches, commercial buildings, and event venues that we could use for classroom spaces. These facilities would have to pass inspections for meeting code.

We are exploring the possibility of the use of on-campus portable classrooms. For an initial discussion of budget impact see the [video](#) of the March 2, School Board Budget Workshop.

In addition, we are working with area companies that supply tents that could become outdoor spaces once the temperatures allow, and into the fall. Tents could be used for classrooms and for eating purposes. We are working to address this challenge.

**Q: Do we have to follow the MDOE Requirements for Safely Opening School in the Fall?**

A: Yes, there are 6 requirements that were last updated on 8/24/20. The requirements are for all public schools in Maine and are available on the MDOE website, as well as below:

The following are required by all schools regardless of their county's red, yellow, or green designation:

6 Requirements for Safely Opening Schools in the Fall

- Symptom Screening at Home Before Coming to School (for all Staff and Students) - Students (parents/caregivers) and staff members must conduct self-checks for symptoms prior to boarding buses or entering school buildings each day. Schools should provide information to families in their primary language to support them in conducting this check. Any person showing symptoms must report their symptoms and not be present at school. Schools must provide clear and accessible directions to parents/caregivers and students for reporting symptoms and absences.
- Physical Distancing and Facilities - Adults must maintain 6 feet of distance from others to the extent possible. Maintaining 3 feet of distance is acceptable between and among students when combined with the other measures outlined in this list of safety requirements. 6 feet of



physical distancing is required for students while eating breakfast and lunch, as students will be unable to wear masks at that time. A “medical isolation room” (separate from the nurse’s office) must be designated for students/staff who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms during the school day. Adequate ventilation is required for classrooms, with schools having flexibility in implementation such as using properly working ventilation systems or outdoor air exchange using fans in open windows or doors. Groups in any one area, room, or classroom must not exceed the Governor’s gathering size limits.

- Masks/Face Coverings - Adults, including educators and staff, are required to wear a mask/face covering. Students age five and above are required to wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth. (updated 7/31/20). Masks are recommended for children ages two to four, when developmentally appropriate. (Updated 7/31/20). Masks/face coverings must be worn by all students on the bus. Face shields may be an alternative for those students with documented medical or behavioral challenges who are unable to wear masks/face coverings. (Updated 8/12/20). The same applies to staff with medical or other health reasons for being unable to wear face coverings. Face shields worn in place of a face covering must extend below the chin and back to the ears. ~~An exception for wearing a mask or face shield applies only to an individual participating in voluntary school sports during vigorous physical exercise. (Updated 09/09/20)~~ (Updated 11.9.20) Nothing in this framework’s mask/face covering requirements should be interpreted as preventing a school from making accommodations on an individualized basis as required by state or federal disabilities laws.(Updated 9/15/20)
- Hand Hygiene - All students and staff in a school must receive training in proper hand hygiene. All students and staff must wash hands or use sanitizing gel upon entering the school, before and after eating, before and after donning or removing a face mask, after using the restroom, before and after use of playgrounds and shared equipment, and before and after riding school transportation (9/4/2020).
- Personal Protective Equipment - Additional safety precautions are required for school nurses and/or any staff supporting students in close proximity, when distance is not possible, or when a student requires physical assistance. These precautions must at a minimum include eye protection (e.g., face shield or goggles) and a mask/face covering. Classrooms and/or areas that have been used by an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 must be closed off until thorough cleaning and sanitization takes place.
- Return to School after Illness - Sick staff members and students must use home isolation until they meet criteria for returning to school.

**Q: Will the six requirements change for the fall 2021 opening of school?**

A: The requirements could change at any time depending on the state of the pandemic. We do not know if they will still be in place for the fall opening of school and must develop several plans that address the various possibilities for fall opening.

**Q: How are teachers and administrators currently using Wednesdays?**

A: Wednesday mornings are being used by teachers for student support. At the high school students and teachers have weekly advisory meetings with their students. In addition Wednesday afternoons are used for holding 504 meetings, IEP meetings, Student Support Team meetings, faculty meetings, department chair meetings, teacher collaboration, teacher preparation for remote days such as recording videos for student instruction, updating Google classroom, and tech training. While in a “normal” year the above meetings are often held after school, and many still are held after school, the teachers’ days are increased in length due to the changed methods of preparing for instruction, and for grading practices that take more time than when we are in an in-person learning situation. Those responsibilities then have to be completed after the school day.

At the middle school Ms. Ramsey is also beginning to have five different band groups meet on Wednesdays; and there will be a 7-plus math course for 7th grade students interested in moving to Algebra in 8th grade, that meets on Wednesdays.

**Q: What is the status of the ventilation projects? Will schools have to switch to remote learning as predicted?**

A: As of 3/5/2021, the ventilation projects at Pond Cove Elementary School and Cape Elizabeth Middle School will be completed without requiring students to change to remote learning during installations, as predicted, thanks to the collaborative effort of the installation company, Perry Schwartz, our Director of Facilities and Transportation, and the school principals. Cape Elizabeth High School ventilation projects are in progress. Students will not need to change to remote learning during those installations.