

To: North Berkshire School Union staff, students, families, and community members

From: John Franzoni, Superintendent of the North Berkshire School Union #43



Subject: 2021-22 NBSU safety protocols for in-person learning

Date: Tuesday, August 24, 2021

On August 24, 2021, the Massachusetts State Board of Education voted to support the mask mandate proposal submitted by DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley to start the school year. This decision by the state board fully supports the votes already taken by all four NBSU district school committees to mandate masks for all individuals entering the school buildings to start the 2021-2022 school year.

Through diligent planning once again by the NBSU principals, teachers, and staff members, we are prepared to reopen our schools for in-person learning again on Wednesday, August 25, 2021. We all hoped to return to school under more "normal" conditions, but unfortunately, the delta variant has caused our local area to be designated as high risk, which has necessitated the implementation of a mask mandate in the school buildings and on the bus to start the year.

There have been some updated safety protocols that have changed since the close of the school year in June. For example, distancing is not being required to begin the school year, masks are not required for outdoor activities at the school, and the travel policy has been rescinded. However, I want to be clear that we will fully support any student who wishes to wear a mask outdoors if that makes them feel safe and comfortable.

It is still the recommendation by the health experts that all students and staff who are ill should stay home from school. However, the NBSU districts have also applied to the state to provide rapid response testing in school this year. Parental consent forms will be sent home with students to get permission to be tested in school under the following two circumstances: mild symptomatic testing and test and stay for individuals who have come in contact with a positive case, but are not exhibiting any symptoms. We are going through the process to obtain the testing materials, train our staff members, and gather the parental consent forms so the testing in school protocols will not begin for a few weeks. It is our goal through this testing plan to keep students in school whenever it is safely possible by conducting the rapid tests. If a family declines to participate, then their child will be required to follow the recommended quarantine period for each situation.

A year ago, schools across the state were closed, but the NBSU students have continued to be safely educated in-person by following school safety protocols that have proven to be effective. I ask that you work together with your school to follow the current protocols in order to keep everyone healthy and the schools open. Please stay safe, and if eligible, get vaccinated!