

AOS 47

Airline, Dedham and Orrington School Departments



Dear Airline, Dedham and Orrington Families,

2/23/2022

It has been a long journey to reach this point in time with this March marking two years since schools felt the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In AOS 47 we have worked together to navigate our way through the last two years while focusing on the support of our students, families and staff as best we could given the ever changing circumstances and guidance. Now, with the sharp decline in positive cases in our community, and with vaccines available to all students and staff who want to access them, it is time to create an on-ramp to greater normalcy in our school district.

As long as we continue to see these lower levels of infection, we will move to a Level 3.5 on Monday, March 14, 2022. The **Level 3.5** column of our [2021-22 Levels of Instruction](#) has further details on what mitigation changes occur in school; this level includes optional masking among other shifts (masking is still required on the bus as a Federal mandate until at least 3/18/22). The Maine Center for Disease Control's (MCDC) and Maine Department of Education's (MDOE) has recently updated the Standard Operating Procedures ([SOP](#)) guiding document that defines the rules that schools have followed throughout the pandemic. The most significant change is removing the requirement to contact trace when a positive case is discovered even if not universally masking.

What that means is that we don't have to quarantine individuals from school if they are a close contact to a positive case, including people choosing not to wear a mask. The only people who will quarantine from school are those who test positive for COVID-19. For anyone who does test positive they will still have to be quarantined for a five-day period and wear a mask for five-days after returning to school.

So as long as we continue to see these lower levels of infection, we will move to level 3.5 on Monday, March 14, 2022 with these new changes in place. The **Level 3.5** column of our [2021-22 Levels of Instruction](#) has further details on where our focus will be as we continue to make progress in returning to give our students the best chance at maximizing their education. This 3.5 level includes being mask optional among other shifts(masking is still required on the bus as a Federal mandate, until at least March 18).

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Here are a few reasons why we think these adjustments are reasonable at this point in time.

- Significant drop in cases over the past few weeks
- Local districts aligning to being mask optional
- Omicron is less severe
- The change in the SOP eliminates contact tracing
- Negative social/emotional impacts of masking
- Negative impacts on learning when masked

The time between now and March 14 should give families who chose to vaccinate a head start on scheduling first or second shots and/or booster shots. If between now and our target date we experience a notable increase in positive cases then we will respond accordingly based on all we've learned about effective mitigation strategies. For the time being we will continue our universal masking as we look to see if there is a post vacation surge in cases, as has been the case following other school breaks. To that end we will continue to have voluntary pooled testing to help us get a snapshot of infection levels in our schools.

Health and safety will continue to be one of our central goals as we also continue to address the effects on our students' social/emotional wellness and their learning. We will continue to examine the data on levels of infection and be ready to make any necessary adjustments. Hopefully things go smoothly and we'll be ready to take the next step toward a return to normalcy. We'll continue to provide updates to the community as we move forward.

Sincerely,

James Stoneton II

Superintendent of Schools

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