



Franklin Public Schools

Office of the Superintendent
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November 19, 2020

Dear Franklin Families,

All of us at Franklin Public Schools hope that you and your family are doing well. We also recognize that this is an incredibly challenging time. I am writing today with a few updates; a similar message has also been shared with our faculty and staff.

Definition of Close Contact

Beginning last week, we have begun using the new CDC definition of close contact when conducting contact tracing, under the direction of our local health department and DPH assigned public health nurse. This means that we are looking to identify those individuals “who have been within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated”, with or without masks. This new definition may lead to additional individuals needing to quarantine. We are asking everyone in our schools to adhere to the 6 feet of distancing whenever possible.

Governor’s Message About In-Person Learning

As you likely know, the Department of Public Health and Governor’s office adjusted the health metrics last Friday, November 6, to take into account both the size of the community and the percent positivity of testing in addition to the number of positive cases per 100,000. The effect has been to change the way communities are identified for risk. Across the state, this has increased the threshold to be a yellow or red community. Franklin returned to green after a few weeks of being yellow; however, on November 12th, Franklin returned to yellow status. It is important to note that a cluster of cases in a particular facility in town is contributing significantly to Franklin’s overall numbers.

As part of this message, the Governor and Commissioner of Education adjusted the state’s expectations of learning models based on the metrics’ new color-coding. To summarize:

- **Districts and schools in communities designated gray, green, or yellow are expected to have students learning fully in-person, if feasible.** A hybrid model should be used only if there is no other way to meet health and safety requirements.
- **Schools in red communities should implement hybrid models while maximizing in-person learning time for high-needs students.**
- **Fully remote instructional models should be implemented only as a last resort.**

While the public health metrics favor in-person learning and we ALL want to get students back into school full-time, guidance based on health metrics alone does not account for feasibility factors that lead me to continue to recommend a hybrid model of instruction.

Several practical matters come immediately to mind with respect to the feasibility of being full and in-person: distancing standards/space, staffing, transportation, and funding.

Similar to many districts across the state, Franklin has committed to 6 feet of distance among individuals based on health guidance, including contact tracing. This means that we can only accommodate roughly half of our students (one-third at

FHS) in a hybrid model. Although we have additional space in some of our buildings for classes of students to spread out, we do not have enough staff to provide two supervisors per class list of students. If we shrink distancing standards to below six feet, the number of individuals quarantining as a result of positive cases will increase dramatically.

Franklin, like many communities, has worked diligently to staff schools and classrooms during the pandemic. The health and safety practices that are in place require additional supervision. This comes at a time when more people are unable or unwilling to work in-person in schools. Although we have sought to add monitors, interventionists, additional paraprofessionals, and permanent building substitutes, many positions remain vacant despite recruitment efforts. As COVID cases increase across the state, we are seeing an increase in the number of staff having to quarantine for long periods of time, exacerbating the problem of supervision. Other districts, at times, have had to return to remote learning for lack of educators in schools. This could be a possibility in the future for one or more schools in Franklin, particularly as cold and flu season approaches and COVID numbers rise.

Full and in-person instruction will require modification to transportation. With buses only able to accommodate one-third of the students at a time, transportation would need to be increased in order to have full and in-person learning. It is not likely that Franklin could add additional buses and, therefore, buses would have to do “double runs” in order to transport all students to school safely. This would disrupt the rhythm of the school day and impact time on learning.

The district would incur additional costs in order to provide full and in-person learning. Additional staff would be needed (even though we would struggle to be able to hire them), and additional Personalized Protective Equipment (PPE) would be required. While we have been fortunate to have been able to access Coronavirus relief funding to both the schools and the Town in order to support PPE, additional staff, tents and fences for outdoor use, HVAC improvements, Chromebooks, software, and other COVID related expenses, this funding must be spent by December 30, 2020, after which we would be expected to incur costs beyond this using tight funds from our operating budget.

Lastly, Franklin, like other districts, worked collaboratively with the union, in our case the Franklin Educators’ Association, to negotiate two unique Memorandum of Agreement in good faith to which we must abide.

We truly value having students in our school buildings -- seeing each other and developing in-person relationships with educators around them. Given the feasibility factors described above, however, we do not have plans at this time to shift to full and in-person instruction.

Over the summer, we had prepared a reopening plan with three models of learning: full and in-person, hybrid; and fully remote. We will continue to develop and refine each model and, as the field understands more about the virus, its risk, and how best to meet health and safety requirements in the school setting, look forward to a time in the future when we can return to school fully in-person.

Recognizing that our Kindergarten and grade 1 learners are struggling the most due to developmental factors, we are prioritizing this group in our examination of how to teach them full and in-person while meeting all health and safety requirements. A series of scenarios/implications will be shared with the School Committee in the coming weeks.

HVAC Update

We have been working with the Facilities Department to put the installation of Ultraviolet Germicidal Irradiation (UVGI) out to bid. The Town will be using Coronavirus relief funding to fund the installation; as noted above, these funds must be spent by December 30, 2020. Unfortunately, there is a supply chain issue of materials. As a result of the spending deadline and supply chain delays, parts of the project will move forward, but parts of the project need to be postponed. UVGI will be installed as follows:

- “Large Units” at ECDC/HMMS/Oak; Remington/Jefferson; Keller/Sullivan to cover large spaces where ventilation is tied together among rooms

- All of Franklin High School

UVGI may be installed in the “Large Units” at DT, Kennedy, and Parmenter if able to be completed by 12/30/2020.

As an alternative to UVGI, the District has purchased portable HEPA air purifier units for classrooms and workspaces where UVGI is postponed. HEPA units will be provided according to the square footage of the room and will filter the air. We expect these to be due in a few weeks, which is helpful as the colder weather approaches. This solution is one that many other Districts have or are pursuing as an effective approach.

Additional information about classrooms, ventilation, windows, especially in light of the approaching winter conditions will be coming out soon.

Travel Reminder/Holiday Celebrations

We would like to remind families of the District's travel expectations and Governor Baker's Executive Order requiring those who travel out of state to quarantine or receive a negative COVID-19 test no more than 72 hours prior to their return to Massachusetts. As noted in the COVID-Handbooks for Families/Students, FPS requires travelers of all ages (including those 10 and under) to test or quarantine when returning to Massachusetts from a non-lower risk state in order to return to school in-person.

As you make plans for holiday celebrations, we recognize that college age students may be returning home. As emphasized in Governor Baker's press conference from yesterday, college age children should also be tested for COVID. Should you have other visitors to your home, they should also be tested. Visitors and college students are also advised to isolate as much as possible, and household members are advised to wear masks, distance physically, practice 20 seconds of handwashing/hand hygiene, and clean high touch surfaces frequently.

Given the increase of cases that seem to be occurring in private gatherings, the Governor and health experts issued guidance about limiting holiday travel and limiting the size of holiday gatherings to those within the immediate household. I recognize the difficulty this presents for staff and families, as holiday gatherings of family and friends are something most looked forward to and celebrated at this time of year. This year, in particular, I think we are all looking for something positive to anticipate. For my family, our gathering will be a quiet dinner for the four of us, and we will be Zooming or Face-timing with our loved ones. We will miss the hugs, kisses, and conversations of extended family and friends, but we feel this is the best course of action for our family.

At this time, Franklin Public Schools does not have a plan to return to full remote learning in anticipation of rising cases due to the Thanksgiving holiday. However, we will monitor case counts and positivity rates closely, in collaboration with our local health department, as we always do. We ask that you please be safe in order to protect the entire community.

Please see the full list of travel guidance here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-order>

On behalf of the entire Franklin Public Schools, I want to extend sincere wishes for a restful Thanksgiving holiday. Please know how grateful and thankful I am for the Franklin community.

Sincerely,

Sara Ahern
Superintendent of Schools